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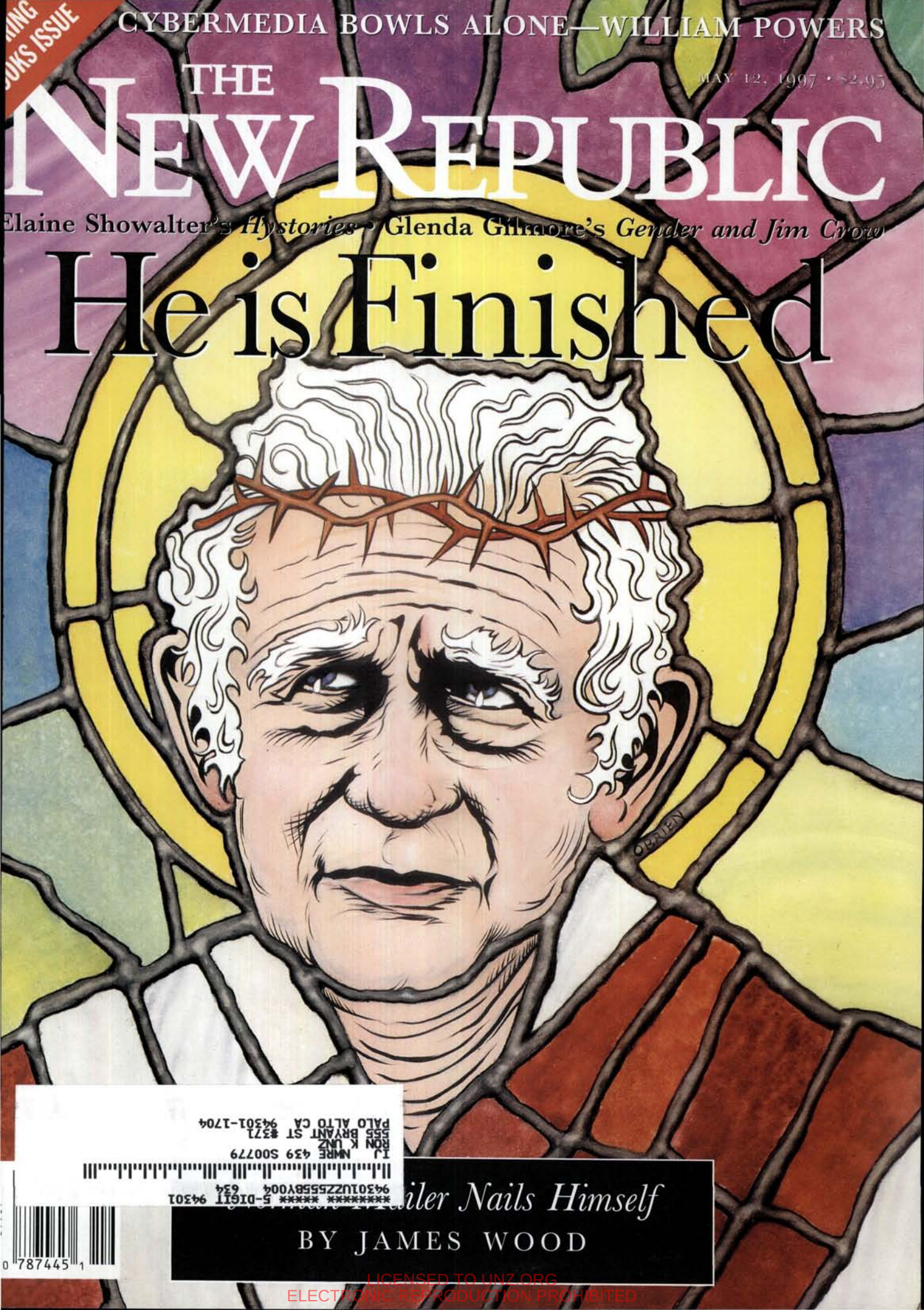

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BY JAMES WOOD

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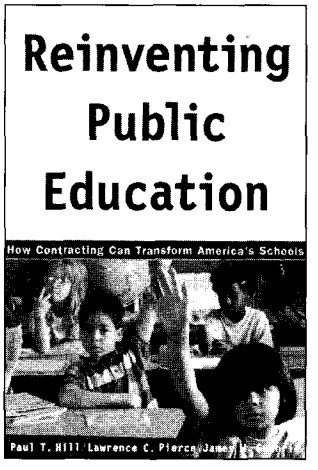

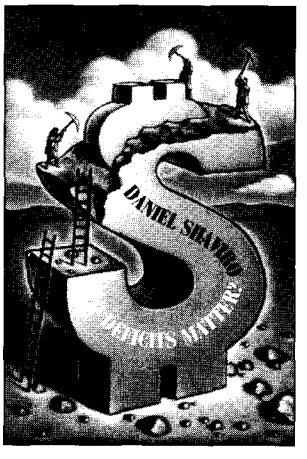

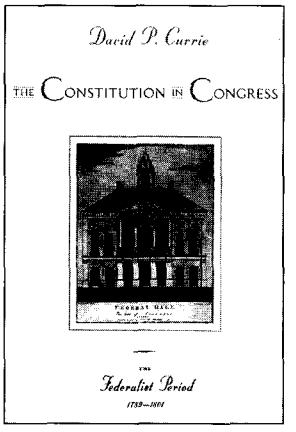

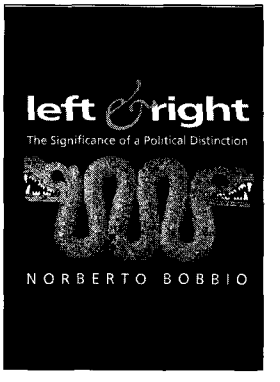

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A Weekly Journal of Opinion

MAY 12, 1997

FOUNDED 1914
WASHINGTON, D.C.
ISSUE 4,295

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THE NEW REPUBLIC, Vol. 216, Number 19, Issue 4,295, May 12, 1997. (Printed in the U.S. on April 23, 1997.) Published weekly (except for combined issues dated Jan. 6 & 13, July 14 & 21, Aug. 11 & 18, and Sept. 8 & 15, 1997) at 1220 19th Street, NW, Washington, DC 20036. Telephone (202) 331-7494. The New Republic Advertising Sales Office (212) 702-4882. Yearly subscriptions, $69.97; foreign, $99.97; Canada, $84.97. Back issues, $3.50 (includes postage & handling).

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(ISSN 0028-6583). Periodicals postage paid at Washington, DC, and additional mailing offices. Indexed in Readers' Guide, Media Review Digest. Microform, Canadian Periodical Index, CD-ROM, issue and article copies are available through University Microfilms Intnl., 300 N. Zeeb Road, Ann Arbor, MI 48106. Telephone 1-800-521-0600. Internet mail address: tnr@aol.com Member, Audit Bureau of Circulations. Unsolicited manuscripts can be returned only if accompanied by a stamped, self-addressed envelope. Subscribers: Please send all remittances, changes of address, and subscription inquiries to Subscription Service Dept., The New Republic, P.O. Box 37298, Boone, IA 50037-0298. For subscription problems call 800-827-1289.

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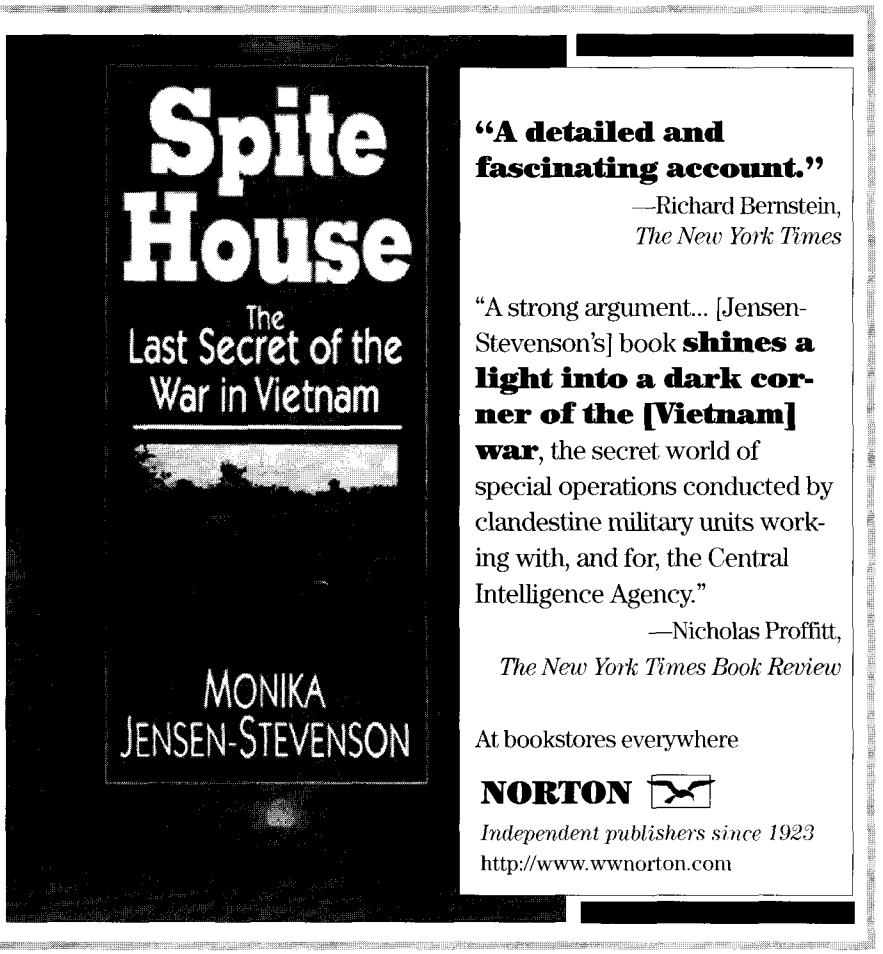
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CORRESPONDENCE

Mythraking

To the editors:

The White House and the Democratic National Committee's defensive tactic of claiming equivalency in the fund-raising scandal—everyone raises money, some people break the law, therefore everyone is implicated in the same moral soup—got a boost from David Grann and Erika Niedowski's "The Dirty Hill" (April 7).

The article seems to say Republicans are somehow "shameless" or "unseemly" because we raise funds. It suggests I was naughty for being in the same room with a Florida utility executive, having "introduced the very bill [he] wanted passed." That bill to clean up radioactive waste piling up in forty-one states and more safely contain it at one location in the Nevada desert has been around in various forms for several Congresses, and it would benefit millions of people and the environment.

Whether one supports new campaign spending limits and public financing, increased private involvement with greater public disclosure or no reform at all, the perpetuation of the myth of equivalency is dishonest and counterproductive.

FRANK MURKOWSKI
U.S. Senator
Washington, D.C.

To the editors:

David Grann and Erika Niedowski inaccurately asserted that, according to court documents, Senator Carol Moseley-Braun spent campaign funds on clothes, jewelry and a stereo.

In fact, the lawsuit by the senator's former campaign treasurer does not allege that the senator personally made such expenditures. Indeed, among the lawsuit's extravagant claims is a baseless allegation that the manager of her 1992 campaign used committee funds to pay for her clothes, jewelry and a stereo. The allegation is false and hotly disputed in the ongoing litigation.

It would have been preferable for the senator or her campaign to have been afforded an opportunity to make these points before TNR published this lazy, clip-job piece of journalism.

BILLIE J. PAIGE
Treasurer, Braun for Senate
Chicago, Illinois

David Grann and Erika Niedowski reply:

Indeed, the lawsuit alleges that Senator Carol Moseley-Braun's former fiancé and campaign manager used campaign funds

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to pay the senator's credit card bills for stereo equipment, jewelry and clothes. Since he worked for the senator and paid her bills, it seems fair to say, as the article does, that Moseley-Braun allegedly spent $39,000 on personal items. Moreover, if the hotly disputed allegations are false, the Illinois senator should certainly appreciate—and even encourage—a thorough investigation by her congressional colleagues. As for Murkowski's letter, he unfortunately failed to recognize the very distinction that we took pains to make. There is nothing inherently wrong with fund-raising. There is, though, something fundamentally wrong with trading access for contributions, allowing lobbyists to write legislation and appropriating campaign funds for personal use.

King Kong

To the editors:

Stan Sesser was kind in introducing me with such gracious compliments ("The Betrayal of Hong Kong," March 10). But the rest of Sesser's piece unfairly and incorrectly denigrates Hong Kong and the hard work of those who are trying to ensure a smooth transition this July 1.

Sesser is dead wrong when he predicts that, after the handover, "the rights and liberties [of] Hong Kong's roughly 6 million citizens ... will erode or vanish." Sesser criticizes the process for selecting Tung Chee Hwa as the chief executive of China's Hong Kong Special Administrative Region, even though Tung is Chinese, a permanent Hong Kong resident and was chosen by 400 other permanent Hong Kong residents who represented all segments of Hong Kong society.

Sesser conveniently forgets that, for over 150 years of colonial rule, the people of Hong Kong have never had a say in choosing their leader. Chris Patten, the current governor of Hong Kong, is British, a non-Hong Kong resident and was appointed to his position by the Queen, as were all his predecessors. Sesser also conveniently ignores that, up to the last minute of colonial rule, Britain held onto executive power.

The people of Hong Kong know they do not live in a democracy and never will under colonial rule. Democracy started in Hong Kong in 1984, when Britain agreed to return Hong Kong to China. How odd it is that we Hong Kongers have to thank Britain for giving us democracy.

NELLIE FONG
Hong Kong

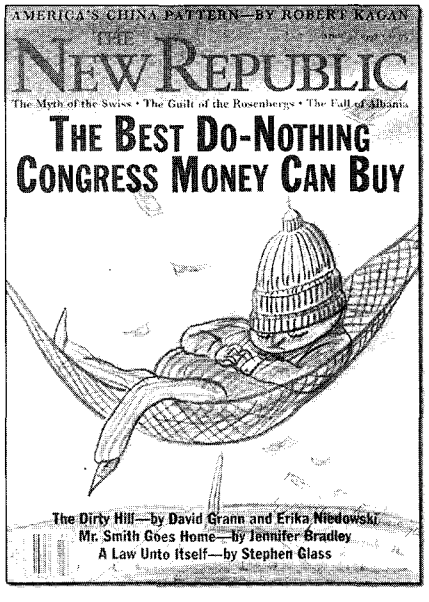
Credit check

To the editors:

In "Bad Credit" (March 31), John Buntin raises a number of issues about microenterprise development in the U.S. He concludes that it is a highly overrated strategy for reducing poverty. Several programs that I direct at the Treasury Department support microenterprise development. Buntin's conclusions are incorrect and premature.

Buntin cites isolated statistics from one microenterprise program in support of his conclusion that this strategy has limited potential in the U.S. But initial findings suggest that microenterprise has strong potential to increase the incomes and assets of low-income individuals—including welfare recipients.

The accomplishments of the U.S. microenterprise field are exemplified by seven leading programs that recently received Presidential Awards for Excel-


AMERICA'S CHINA PATTERN—BY ROBERT KAGAN
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THE BEST DO-NOTHING CONGRESS MONEY CAN BUY
The Dirty Hill—by David Grann and Erika Niedowski
Mr. Smith Goes Home—by Jennifer Bradley
A Law Unto Itself—by Stephen Glass

lence. Collectively, these programs have loaned over $18 million and assisted more than 7,500 individuals. On average, 60 percent of their clients were women, 55 percent were minorities, and over one-half were low-income. Moreover, between 1993 and 1995 their annual loan loss rates averaged less than 6 percent.

Buntin also says that, in an industrialized economy, it is difficult to achieve the size and cost-efficiency of microenterprise programs overseas. Success will be defined differently in the United States. But the impressive success of microcredit in developing nations is also the result of twenty years of hard work and experimentation, as well as continued investment by the United States and others. During those years, the international microenterprise community worked through many of the challenges that the still-young U.S. industry now faces.

KIRSTEN S. MOY
U.S. Treasury Department
Washington, D.C.

Acting out

To the editors:

In James Wolcott's mean-spirited review of Kathryn Harrison's *The Kiss* ("Dating Your Dad," March 31), he pines for the days when it took the likes of Sigmund Freud to plumb the unconscious and tell us what women really want. Not content to praise Freud, however, Wolcott does a bit of psychological sleuthing himself. In language dripping with pop psychologese, he concludes that Harrison's "acting out" was "unconsciously intended to inflict discomfort" on her family. By his logic, her book fails not so much because she's a bad writer but because she's a bad mother.

This is not the first time Wolcott has blasted a woman writer. About a year ago, he wrote a *New Yorker* article eviscerating Maureen Dowd as an example of a general trend in female journalism toward the apolitical, the domestic and the flirtatious. In his review of *The Kiss*, he switches his attention from the fatuous journalist to the equally fatuous female memoir writer. In suggesting that what these writers lack in substance they make up for in vanity and coquetry, Wolcott invokes perhaps the single most antiquated stereotype of the professional woman.

Dowd and Harrison inject their prose with the personal. This, according to Wolcott, is their one true crime, that which threatens the downfall of great journalism and great literature. But if "serious" writing steers clear of sensationalist revelation, what are we to make of Wolcott's own lurid claims concerning Harrison's "true" writerly intentions? Sure, he's all for "getting people to put a cork in it," except when it comes to his own psycho-babble. In exposing what Hawthorne once called that "damned mob of scribbling women," Wolcott plays Dr. Freud one minute and Queen Victoria the next.

GILLIAN SILVERMAN
Buffalo, New York

Declined

To the editors:

I appreciate your running my letter on the new welfare law (April 28), but it contained a typo. The sentence in question should have read: "Plus, harsh Food Stamp provisions began to take effect March 1, when nearly 500,000 jobless adults started being taken off Food Stamps, in most cases because they could not find a job and their state declined to fund workfare programs for them."

ROBERT GREENSTEIN
Center on Budget and Policy Priorities
Washington, D.C.

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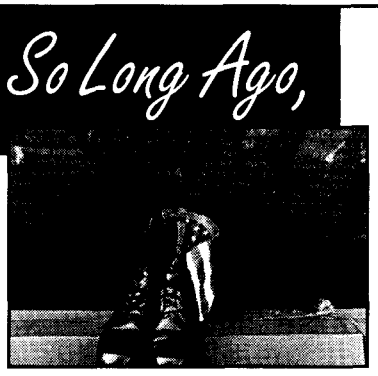

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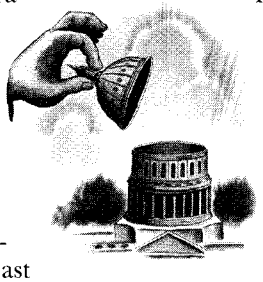
FROM WASHINGTON

What, me worry?

The seasons are turning and so is Jim McDougal. Once the Whitewater business partner of Bill and Hillary Clinton, now a convicted felon turned state's evidence, McDougal says that all of his many previous statements attesting to the president's utter innocence have been rendered inoperative, due to sudden illness and fatigue: "I just got sick and tired of lying for the fellow." McDougal is now cooperating, as they say, fully (any more fully, and he'd have to be wearing a peignoir) with Ken Starr, the man he once called a "Republican gangster." Starr, who last week recommended that the newly helpful McDougal serve only three years in prison out of a possible sentence of eighty-four years for his role in defrauding his own bank and the Small Business Administration, says McDougal has given him information on "a wide range of matters, including matters previously unknown to us," and has led investigators to new witnesses and documents.



McDougal says Clinton "should be deeply concerned" by what he has to say. The president, the Alfred E. Neuman of scandal, is insouciant. "We had nothing to do with the business matters that were the subject of the trial," he tells reporters. "No, I'm not worried at all." The president's blithe spirit is worth contemplating. Is he right to be so unconcerned? Is he really in no trouble that a little time and spin won't fix?

Starr's grand jury investigation has just been extended for six months, after Starr attested in federal court that he had "extensive evidence" of obstruction of justice. Last year, at the same time Starr was pressuring Webb Hubbell to provide evidence against the president, Bill's friends decided to do Webb a favor. Right after Hubbell was forced to quit his job as associate attorney general amid allegations of thievery, current White House chief of staff Erskine Bowles and former chief of staff Thomas F. "Mack" McLarty helped Hubbell in what developed as a successful campaign to glom nearly half a million dollars in consulting fees from friends of the president. Last week, Starr called Bowles and McLarty in to explain this act of compassion.

Obstruction of justice is only one of the two broad issues in the investigation of the Clintons. The other is perjury. At the heart of the May 1996 trial in which Jim McDougal and his wife Susan, along with then-Arkansas Governor Jim Guy Tucker, were convicted of fraud and conspiracy was an alleged scheme by these three and others to obtain $3 million in illegal loans by bilking a Small Business Administration program intended to benefit "socially and economically disadvantaged" entrepreneurs ("bend it, don't end it"). One of the illegal loans, provided through a small business investment company owned by a Little Rock operator named David Hale, was for $300,000 to Susan McDougal. Of this $300,000 obtained by robbing the taxpayers and the poor, $50,000 found its way to the Whitewater land company, then co-owned by the Clintons.

During the trial, Hale testified that he arranged the $300,000 loan after being personally pressured to do so by then-Governor Bill Clinton. Clinton, repeating sworn testimony he had already provided to federal investigators, testified under oath and on videotape that he had no involvement with this loan whatsoever. For four years, the McDougals backed Clinton up on this. Now Jim confirms Hale's story, which gives Starr two witnesses who say the president is a crook and a perjurer. Susan, convicted of fraud and awaiting a second, unrelated, trial on embezzlement charges in California, was ordered jailed last September after she refused to tell Starr's grand jury whether Clinton was involved in the $300,000 loan. She remains, so far, mum. But the extension of Starr's investigation means another six months of jail time unless she talks, which is the kind of thing that can challenge the bonds of friendship.

Of course, Clinton has a couple of things on his side. Hale and Jim McDougal, both convicted crooks and admitted liars, are two of the most dubious characters to arrive on the public stage since the Duke and Dauphin. McDougal, moreover, is by all available evidence mad, a manic-depressive of high, florid style. A March hare, listening to McDougal hold forth, would shake his

continued on page 49

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THE NEW REPUBLIC

MAY 12, 1997

HUMAN WRONGS

So President Clinton has finally approved sanctions against the Burmese military junta, a bold bow to the inevitable. Under the terms of a 1996 law sponsored by then-Senator William Cohen and Senator Dianne Feinstein, the United States had no choice but to enact sanctions if it were found that Burma's ruling body, the State Law and Order Restoration Council (SLORC), had engaged in "large-scale repression" or had detained opposition leader and Nobel Peace Prize laureate Daw Aung San Suu Kyi. Which, in both cases, it had. In the end, not even the expert euphemists and skilled obscurantists of the Clinton administration could evade the realities of Burma: 2,000 political arrests; expulsion of an ethnic group, the Karens, close to Thailand; state-sanctioned torture and state-sanctioned drug-running; and ruthless suppression of the press.

The admission of the obvious in the case of Burma comes, however, in the service of greater evasion. The Clinton administration dawdled on punishing Burma because of its reluctance to contrast its human rights policy toward Burma (or Myanmar, as the SLORC prefers) with its human rights policy toward (you guessed it) Beijing. While the United States is prepared to cut off future, but not current, investment in Burma, it has completely separated trade from human rights toward China. Clintonites argue that China is not Burma (or, for that matter, Myanmar), and that, while American interests in the case of the latter may be served by the use of trade as a weapon, its interests in the case of the former are better served by talk. China and the U.S., Secretary of State Madeleine Albright declared in a recent policy address, "are visiting each other, studying with each other, doing business with each other, philosophizing with each other and learning from each other."

When they aren't invoking idyllic visions of a U.S.-Chinese salon, the Clintonites argue that our China policy cannot be rooted in human rights, but that, rather, strategic, economic and human rights issues must be viewed separately. Nothing could be more mistaken. The awarding or denial of Most Favored Nation trading status may be an overly blunt instrument with which to pressure China, but the Chinese regime does respond to potential humiliations. If China is, as the administration believes (or says it believes), impervious to criticisms of its human rights record, then why did it desperately fight against any attempt by the annual U.N. Human Rights Commission in Geneva to censure it? As Andrew J. Nathan points out in the current *Washington Quarterly*, Beijing has only acceded to American demands when the White House and Congress have pressured it, from the release of 881 Tiananmen prisoners to allowing Fang Lizhi to emigrate to America. In any case, the claim that the United States cannot focus exclusively on human rights is a smoke screen; the United States has *never* consistently employed economic and diplomatic pressure against China in order to urge an improvement on human rights. To those who say, as the Clintonites do, that trade sanctions don't work, the answer is: How do you know?

The next line of defense for China appeasers is that the human rights situation isn't all that dire. Owen Harries, in the May 5 *National Review*, maintains that, since the number of political prisoners in China is estimated at 3,000, "in a population of 1.3 billion, this amounts to 0.00023 per cent, which is hardly the equivalent of the Gulag or the Nazi concentration camps"—as though Auschwitz were the entry-level standard for moral outrage.

All of these parsings now have been exposed for what they are. In granting the moral case for using trade against Myanmar because its junta had, in the words of a senior administration official, "engaged in what under the law is called widespread repression," the White House has conceded the moral case for using trade against Myanmar. Does anyone think that China's record when it comes to "widespread repression" is *less* odious than Myanmar's?

The government of China has been, and remains, a regime committed to a policy of imprisoning democracy activists, suppressing the freedom of religion, employing slave labor and forcing abortions and sterilizations on its female citizens. And, of course, it remains committed to a campaign of genocide against the Tibetan people, who have already seen the slaughter of more than a million of their people in the past forty years. What is the true great difference between Burma and China? It is this: there isn't much of a Burmese lobby in Washington. •

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NOTEBOOK

A THIN REED: Every so often, Washington culture chews up a man of ideals and spits him out as a lobbyist, or a consultant, or some type who makes gobs more money than he used to working for a cause in which he doesn't believe. And by now, we all shrug. After all, we've learned that the lure of a bigger house and a better car can be as strong here as it is on Wall Street; even Carter's band of dreamers resurfaced in the '90s as merchant bankers and K Street hustlers. In this spirit, Ralph Reed resigned on April 23 as head of the Christian Coalition to start his own consulting firm, called Century Strategies. The millennial name only heightens the irony. It's one thing to abandon your calling if it's just some little thing like more money for Head Start, or human rights in Myanmar. But what if your calling is a tad larger, more ambitious—such as saving 250 million lost souls from burning in hell forever? Bringing the Lord's message to a nation of heathens. Snatching innocent unborn children from the jaws of Moloch. God's work. Oh, what the hell. Maybe it wasn't such a big deal after all; drinks are on me, senator.

DIRTY TRICKS: As is frequently bemoaned, politics isn't what it used to be. Lawmakers can no longer take gifts from lobbyists or have free ice delivered to their offices. And now, at least if they are members of the Nevada state legislature, they can't even go on straightforward, absolutely necessary fact-finding missions to brothels. "We're talking about a legitimate Nevada business," fumed Democratic Assemblyman Bob Price when he heard his trip to the Mustang Ranch had been canceled because of bad press. Poor Price, he and his colleagues were only trying to serve their fellow citizens. But Price shouldn't be too distressed. He got to lead a similar field trip two years ago. Bob, we promise, not much has changed in the practice of the world's oldest profession.

TOMMY, CAN YOU HEAR ME: Netmoguls touting the World Wide Web as a robust new frontier of free enterprise and conspicuous consumption might want to think again. Trendsetting corporations peddling their wares in cyberspace are fast becoming boycott bait for conspiracists and cranks. First, menswear magnate Tommy Hilfiger found himself the target of an ugly and entirely false rumor that he had, while appearing on Oprah Winfrey's show, dissed Asians and blacks. "Summed up, he basically said that if he had known so many Chinamen and niggers were going to buy his clothes, he never would have made [them] so nice," wrote the outraged webmistress of the Official Philippine Anti-Tommy Hilfiger Site. Hilfiger's frantic email rebuttals, pointing out that, for starters, he has never appeared on "Oprah," apparently did little to quell the surfers' suspicions. Meanwhile, the Nike Corporation is also learning that the Infobahn is no consumerist Shangri-La. In recent weeks, Arab American groups have blitzed the company's web site with angry email protesting a new line of athletic shoes in which the cursive logo "AIR" supposedly resembles the word "ALLAH." At a Washington press conference, protesters called upon Nike to investigate "whether there are people at the company who want to insult Muslims." The company has now moved into self-flagellation mode, recalling the blasphemous brogans. No word yet on whether the shoe giant will comply with the webheads' other demands: "sensitivity training about Islam by Muslims for marketing and graphic design teams."

HERSHEY KISS: When Democratic and Republican House members returned from a March retreat in Hershey, Pennsylvania, they spoke openly about dreams for civility and bipartisanship. Thankfully, the spirit of Hershey has given way once again to the spirit of Washington. On April 10, while wrangling over campaign finance reform, Majority Whip Tom DeLay and Representative David Obey treated gallery spectators to a pushing and shoving bout on the House floor, which included, as *The New York Times* coyly reported, DeLay "[shouting] at Mr. Obey that his tactics amounted to chicken droppings." (Less coy news organizations informed their readers that DeLay had called Obey a "gutless chickenshit.") Eight days later, Democrat John Lewis rose to the floor and lambasted his GOP mates for applauding Newt Gingrich for "paying $300,000 for lying to Congress." Republicans effectively banished him for the rest of the day. "He thinks that because he is a civil rights saint," complained Georgia Republican John Linder, "he does not have to abide by the rules of the House." Meanwhile, over in the Senate, Rick Santorum, after a heated exchange with Dianne Feinstein last week, reportedly rolled his eyes, turned to Senator Don Nickles, and muttered, "What a bitch." Now, that's the kind of congressional kiss we're used to.

HOME NEWS: With this issue, associate editor Hanna Rosin, whose fine reportage has ranged from the rise of pot to the fall of Newt, joins the august ranks of TNR's senior editors, who, in their penthouse suite of Babylonian splendor high above the nation's capital, dwell in an almost unimaginable state of power and privilege.

CORRECTION: In a recent article on Alexis Herman, President Clinton's nominee for Secretary of Labor ("Dishonest Labor," April 28), White House spokesman Joe Lockhart was described as saying it did not matter if Herman had misstated the truth to the Senate Labor Committee when she denied that she had provided any benefit in her capacity as a government or Democratic Party official to private business associate Vanessa Weaver. Lockhart did not concede that Herman had misstated the truth. He said that it did not matter that Herman had provided Weaver with a specific DNC contract, because the contract did not qualify as a benefit, and so Herman had not misled the committee. It was an editor's error. •

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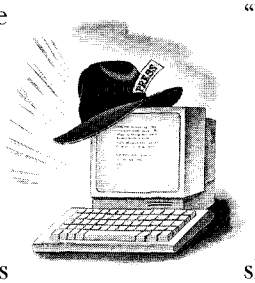
MAURITANIA DISPATCH

VIRTUAL SLAVERY

By David Hecht

"I am a slave," declares Mariya Skayira, an 80-year-old woman from Boutilimit, Mauritania, a small town in the southwest corner of the Sahara Desert. "All of us here are," she says, gesturing to fifty people assembled outside their tents and shacks on the slope of a giant dune. They are Muslims, mostly of African origin, who adopted the language and customs of Arab/Berber Maurs before the Maurish invasion of Spain in the eighth century. Black Maurs are called *Haratin* in the local Arabic dialect, meaning "former slaves." But according to some observers of Mauritania, including members of the U.S. Congress, the "former" is premature.



Last fall, Congress banned non-humanitarian aid to the government of Mauritania until it "eliminates" slavery. The problem is that the more sanguine State Department asserts that slavery in Mauritania has already "virtually disappeared." The law bans both economic and military assistance, yet, just a month after it passed, a U.S. naval ship sailed into the port of Nouakchott, the capital of Mauritania, to conduct joint exercises and training with Mauritania's armed forces. U.S. Defense Attaché Paul Cariker says the ban will continue to be ignored.

Who's right? The evidence presented last year by anti-slavery activists to two congressional subcommittees is not easy to ignore. Arab slave raiders "capture [African] children and in some circumstances women to breed slaves," stated Mohammed Nacir Athie, a former Mauritanian diplomat granted asylum in the United States. Charles Jacobs, a human rights activist, testified that slaves are treated as "concubines." "They may be exchanged for camels, trucks or money," he explained. Many slaves undergo exotic torture, he said, including the "camel treatment," the "insect treatment" and the "burning coals treatment." Sam Cotton, a journalist who went undercover in Mauritania, and the human rights group Africa Watch support Jacobs's statements. The committee even inspected a receipt for the sale of a female slave and her baby daughter, which stated that the buyer "accepts the slave in spite of her insubmissiveness."

Still, the Clinton administration remained unconvinced. According to Deputy Assistant Secretary for African Affairs William Twaddell, embassy staff in Mauritania investigated the slave purchase for which the receipt was found and concluded that the signatures were forged. Asked if he was disputing all the anti-slavery allegations presented to the committee, Twaddell replied they "have not credibly been brought to our attention."

"They must be blind," retorted one congressman. Others wondered why the State Department's human rights report for 1994 documents 90,000 slaves in Mauritania while in the 1995 and 1996 reports the slaves have "virtually disappeared." Cotton alleges that the administration started going soft on Mauritania after American industry won a big satellite communications contract there and the Sahelian country cut its ties with Iraq.

But if the truth about slavery in Mauritania is hard to discern in Washington, it is perhaps even more elusive in Boutilimit. Yes, Skayira says she was born a slave, and that her master, a camel herder, has never paid her a day's wages. She also says, however, that she is not enslaved against her will, and has never been beaten or ill-treated. "It would be against God" to leave her master, she said. "And anyway, there would be no work if I left." She's right; wage labor is indeed rare in Mauritania.

Then there is 36-year-old Hanna Mint Souleymine. She says she is one of twenty-five slaves born to Mohammed Ould Bihizirde, but that he is destitute. "He has no cows, no wives, no children, no money, no house." Where does he live? "With us here in the slave section," she says, nudging a half-dazed old man sitting next to her. How long has he been with you here? "Since 1964." Why don't you leave him? They all laugh. "Leave him! He would have to leave us," she says. "But we wouldn't do that to you," she says, cajoling him.

Masters like Bihizirde are not the exception. With recurring drought, many herders have lost their cattle and been forced to move to town with their families and slaves. The slaves often take up petty trading and adapt better than their masters to urban life.

About a mile from Boutilimit's slave section, a self-described master named Ahmed Ould Haourmetaullah contemplates slave/master relations in Mauritania. "Hegel said that in the dialectics of slavery the master becomes a slave to his slave. Nowhere was he more right than here," he says, lounging in his large open tent and sipping sweet green tea. A stern-looking man in a long robe and an Abraham Lincoln beard, Haourmetaullah comes from a family of spiritual leaders who have survived the droughts better than most herders. They still own many slaves. Haourmetaullah claims that masters here never have total power over their slaves. "Who exactly looks after whom, and who controls whom, is often ambiguous. It depends on individual relationships."

Three slaves sit next to him in his tent—all women. He introduces the oldest of them as his only wife. "Intermarriage has always been common amongst us," he says. "We *Bidan* [Arab/Berbers] may believe we are superior to *Haratin*, but we like to mix the blood."

Hindou Mint Ainina, editor-in-chief of *Le Calame*, one of the leading independent newspapers in Nouakchott, makes a similar point, suggesting that slavery in Mauritania is largely a "sexual thing." When Mauritanian men

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find a woman attractive, she explains, they shout "slave" to her. Asked what she thinks her government should do about slavery, she replies sarcastically: "Give slaves thirty acres and a mule? Remember, this is the Sahara Desert. Create jobs. We're one of the least developed countries in the world."

Congress's single-minded focus on slavery strikes some intellectuals here as a bit odd. After all, State Department reports acknowledge that the regime's overall human rights record is abysmal. Colonel Maaouya Ould Sid'Ahmed Taya, say the reports, rules through intimidation and brute force. Embassy officials cite cases of torture and murder by the armed forces. Since 1992, Mauritania has assumed a veneer of democracy, but the officials acknowledge that elections are mostly rigged.

Take the fate of the Hal-Pulaar and Soninke, African ethnic groups from southern Mauritania. While they haven't been enslaved, they have been singled out for political persecution by the Maur-dominated government. According to the State Department, 70,000 southerners were expelled to neighboring Senegal between 1989 and 1991, and hundreds more were killed. More than 500 Hal-Pulaar in Mauritania's armed forces were reportedly tortured to death during the same period.

Ainina wonders why the law singles out only the injustice of slavery. Her newspaper was banned earlier this month, and several of her staff were arrested and tortured. Slavery, she says, "is one of the few evils this regime should not be held accountable for."

Ainina scoffs at the stories of "slave raids" described to Congress and has never heard of the bizarre camel, insect or hot sand tortures described to wide-eyed congressmen. Many in Mauritania believe these tales were concocted by members of FLAM (Forces pour la liberation des Africains Mauritaniens), a liberation group for non-Maur Africans, as anti-government propaganda. "They [the rebels] have many legitimate grievances," said a senior U.S. Foreign Service official, "but slavery is not one of them." And what about the discrepancy between the State Department's 1994 and 1995 human rights reports? Unofficially, "we just goofed," says a department official. "There may indeed be 90,000 Mauritanians who call themselves slaves, but forms of slavery exist in many African societies. They are mostly social problems. They shouldn't be in a document about a government's human rights record."

Slavery has been abolished in Mauritania twice since independence, and a considerable body of legislation protecting the rights of the *Haratin* is now in place. Some nasty traditions, such as the right of a master to inherit a slave's property when he or she dies, remain. But when such cases go to court, most masters now lose.

Ainina wonders whether Americans are really focused on Mauritania or their own past. "Do they think we have big plantations here and white mansions on top of the hill?" she asks. "They are sadly mistaken."

DAVID HECHT is a BBC correspondent in Senegal and coauthor of a book on Africa, *Invisible Governance* (Autonomedia).

FALKLANDS POSTCARD

CRY FOR ME

By Joshua Hammer

The settlement of Darwin is nearly abandoned now. But Brett Hardcastle, one of its few remaining residents, remembers vividly the blustery April day in 1982 when an Argentine army captain led 1,700 troops into the tiny village. "We're here to free you from colonialism," the captain said. At first, Hardcastle remembers, relations between the soldiers and the Falkland Islanders were cordial. But when British bombers struck the Goose Green Air Strip near Darwin, killing eleven Argentine soldiers, the furious captain locked up Hardcastle, his wife and 114 other Darwinians in a meeting hall, where they remained, sleeping on the floor and eating army rations, until British paratroopers attacked a month later.

The fight for Darwin was furious. "The battle went on all night until five the following afternoon," Hardcastle recalled; his white clapboard house is still marked with holes from the twenty-eight bullets that tore through it. Seventeen Britons and forty-five Argentines died before the Argentines surrendered at Goose Green on May 30.

This past February, the Argentines returned to Darwin. A group of relatives of the Argentine soldiers who perished in the fight for the air strip came to visit the graves. Argentines have been mostly barred from traveling to the islands since the war, but the relatives were given special permission to visit, and to spend the night in Darwin. The day before I met Hardcastle, a rickety schoolbus had discharged fifteen of these somber tourists in front of a seldom used hotel next door to his house. Hardcastle, a retired sheep farmer, watched the procession silently, trying to quell his feelings of bitterness. "I don't bear them ill will," he said. "If the Argentine politicians would just say, 'We'll forget this claim,' we could have a normal relationship with them. But now, as far as we're concerned, Argentina doesn't exist."

Argentina will not forget its claim on Hardcastle's home, the islands it calls Las Malvinas. In South America's second-largest country, the Falklands war remains an obsession. Billboards over every highway proclaim "Las Malvinas Belong to Argentina," and nationalists and militarists regularly rally around Las Malvinas Memorial in Buenos Aires, a black granite slab engraved with the names of 655 fallen soldiers and lit by the usual eternal flame. Every week, newspapers carry front-page reports on President Carlos Saúl Menem's latest quixotic scheme to regain control over the islands; in March, Argentina's foreign minister was in London proposing a

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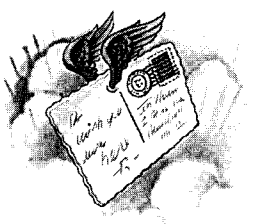
Caribbean "summit" to "resolve" the sovereignty dispute. (Britain has repeatedly said that the matter is not up for negotiation.) Ask virtually any Argentine—student, taxi driver, businessman—what he thinks about the islands, and you'll hear the same reply: they're ours, the British stole them, someday justice will prevail.

Aside from geographical proximity, Argentina's claim to the Falklands dates to the early nineteenth century, when it established—and soon abandoned—a settlement on the east end of the islands. In 1833, Britain claimed the territory, built a capital and port at Stanley, and established a colonial government that has ruled the Falklands ever since. Virtually all of the 2,000-plus inhabitants are descendants of English sheep herders who arrived over 150 years ago. This fact came as a shock to the teenage Argentine recruits who stormed ashore in 1982, believing they were freeing Spanish-speaking brethren from the yoke of colonial rule.

It is impossible to fly directly from Argentina to the islands, so I traveled there circuitously, flying first to Punta Arenas, Chile, and then catching the weekly Falklands flight, an aging Boeing 727 that was about a quarter filled with passengers, most of them Chilean squid fishermen and American ecotourists bound for an Antarctic cruise. Signs around the airport baggage claim offer a reminder of the war's legacy: "As a result of the 1982 conflict, areas of the Falklands are still contaminated with un-exploded ordnance and mines," they read. "They are still a hazard, and will remain so for many years to come. IF YOU FIND ANYTHING SUSPICIOUS DO NOT TOUCH IT."



Riding across the empty tundra to Stanley, the capital, one sees everywhere cordoned-off mine fields and skull-and-crossbones warning signs. In the green hills just above Stanley, shell casings and rusting canteens litter old trenches and bunkers: the remnants of ill-equipped Argentine troops who nearly froze to death while camped here during the Falklands winter.

But the cover of war's detritus belies sweeping changes. Sitting in a sunlit suite, behind a desk that sports clocks showing the times in Windhoek, Taipei and Reykjavik, self-made millionaire Terry Betts exults in a pleasure that used to be almost unknown here, the joy of being filthy rich. "There's a positiveness here now that didn't exist before," Betts said. Betts epitomizes the islands' transformation from feudal backwater to end-of-the-world entrepôt. He was eking out a living as a stevedore before the war, he told me. But the war brought unexpected opportunity. In 1987, Britain declared a 150-mile territorial zone around the Falklands and set up air and sea patrols to enforce the protected area. Betts began brokering squid fishing licenses to Japanese, Korean and Taiwanese fleets, and parlayed that initial success into JBG Falklands Ltd. He now owns seven trawlers and is a joint-venture partner in a dozen international fishing operations, with revenues of $30 million in 1996.

"The government's earning $40 million a year from licenses," Betts said. "We're running a $15 million budget surplus. We've got reserves of $200 million for 2,100 people." The local administration has built a new high school and hospital, offers citizens a free college education in England and provides free vacations abroad for all civil servants. And the islands could soon become even richer: Betts gestured out the window, where a seismographic vessel conducting surveys for Royal Dutch/Shell Group had just docked at Stanley harbor. Next year, seven companies will begin drilling oil wells in the Falklands' waters. Geologists estimate that the islands' reserves total between 2 and 3 billion barrels—approaching those of the North Sea. "I'm looking to get a piece of the oil business now," Betts said. "The London papers are already calling us 'The New Kuwait.' "

The boom has made life in a very hard place a bit easier. Before the war, it took a month for Brook Hardcastle to travel from Darwin to London. The odyssey included a three-day trip across then roadless tundra to Stanley, a one-week boat ride to Montevideo, Uruguay, and a three-week ride on a Royal Mail ship to England. Now he does it in two days. The island got international telephone service a decade ago, and a four-channel TV service was launched in 1989. Everybody, it seems, drives a brand-new British Land Rover, and the monthly vessels from England and Chile are stocked with electronic goods and other luxury items. A local entrepreneur is currently negotiating with Internet providers, and, by the end of 1997, the Falklands will be online.

These changes are surface matters, though. The core of the Falkands is constant. Attitudes toward Argentina have, if anything, hardened over the years since the war. At about the time that the oil companies began their seismic surveys, Falkanders began receiving odd little gifts from Argentine Foreign Minister Guido Di Tella: videotapes of the popular British cartoon series "Pingu the Penguin," copies of Antoine de Saint-Exupéry's *The Little Prince*, photos of Di Tella with his grandchildren. The gift campaign won Argentina nothing but the islanders' deep amusement. Another aspect of island life that has remained constant is a tolerance for shady characters and misfits. There's the near-toothless cook from Liverpool who arrived in 1984, fleeing a disreputable past; and there's the American woman who jumped an Antarctic survey ship in 1988 and now publishes her own newspaper. Perhaps the most poignant case is a Vietnam War veteran, suffering from post-traumatic stress syndrome, who left the United States in search of tranquillity—and arrived in the Falklands in February 1982. Two months later Argentina invaded, and the American became permanently unhinged. Today, he spends his days riding a bicycle aimlessly around Stanley, draped in dozens of whistles and bells, muttering to himself. "It's still an excellent place to be crazy," says local guide and fixer Tony Smith, as he calls for another drink at the swank bar in the island's newest hotel, which is named, in a bit of nose-thumbing humor, Malvinas House.

JOSHUA HAMMER covers Latin America for *Newsweek*.

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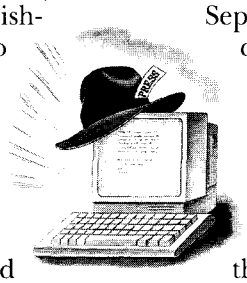
JERUSALEM DISPATCH

THE OUTSIDERS

By Gershom Gorenberg

The posters covered Jerusalem's public notice boards, wallpapering over movie billings and bright photos urging the faithful to celebrate Passover in Hebron. "We won't let them steal power," some read, in stark, black letters, the cheapest, quickest possible printing; others said "Netanyahu, the nation is with you." The posters appeared as soon as news leaked that a police report placed the prime minister squarely in the middle of a major political scandal, and they marked the battle lines precisely as Netanyahu wanted them: the outsiders against the establishment—cops, journalists, Labor politicians—who were conspiring once again to rob them of influence.



The same message came from Aryeh Deri, the 38-year-old, chronically agitated leader of the fundamentalist Shas movement and the second key figure in the case. The police and state-owned Channel 1 TV, Deri said, intended "to bring down the government and the prime minister.... There are groups, for some reason called the elite and 'the enlightened public,' who can't get used to a right-wing prime minister, in power with religious parties," he told his party's newspaper. Mixing liturgy and street talk, he said, "The book is open and the hand inscribes. We'll settle accounts." From Deri, the words had an ethnic bite; his party appeals to Jews from Muslim countries, and it fuses faith with their resentment of an establishment whose main roots are European.

The prosecutors' decision several days later not to charge Netanyahu seems unlikely to end the scandal. The prosecution plans to press new charges against Deri, already on trial for corruption, for pressuring the prime minister to appoint an unknown lawyer as the country's attorney general to solve his personal legal problems. Had the appointee, Roni Bar-On, not quit after two days of public uproar in January, law enforcement would have been fatally compromised. The prosecution said that there was insufficient proof that Netanyahu had knowingly acted at Deri's behest—but it stressed that there was "substantial suspicion" about the prime minister's actions, and it cast strong doubt on his honesty under police questioning.

An indictment is still possible: Israeli law allows citizens to petition the Supreme Court to overrule the prosecution's decision. Even without legal charges, the report leaves Netanyahu wounded. Centrist coalition partners are demanding changes in his decision-making style. With the option of bringing Labor into his government now closed, Netanyahu needs to shore up public support. The affair can't be separated from the personalities of Netanyahu and the even more embattled Deri. But the implications are wider. Both men have already begun exploiting deep divisions in the country.

The prime minister has European roots—a professor's son, educated at American universities; from the start, he has been a media politician. Deri is a Moroccan-born ex-yeshiva student, whose gift is grass-roots politics, consistently underestimated by the press and rival parties. What they share is the experience of getting power at an early age, apparently exaggerating what they can do with it, and holding a deep grudge against anyone else who has it.

Deri's Shas movement was formed in the early '80s, building on the appeal of Rabbi Ovadiah Yosef, the most prominent religious scholar among Sephardic Jews—Jews from Muslim countries. Shas spoke of a double rebellion, one against European rabbis who looked down on Sephardic religion and another against the Western, once-socialist Israeli establishment that had pushed the Sephardic immigrants of the 1950s into the lower class and showed contempt toward their religious traditions. The way to repair lives cracked by the immigrant experience, Shas asserted, was to "restore the crown" of old-time faith. Shas political rallies were like revival meetings.

In poor neighborhoods, the party set up parochial schools where classes lasted until late in the day, a boon for working mothers and a way to keep kids off the streets. With every election, the party grew. In the 1996 campaign, the press and left-wing politicians mocked it for giving supporters amulets blessed by a centenarian Sephardic mystic, Rabbi Yitzhak Kaduri. The critics didn't notice that these talismans reassured bus-riding poor people shaken by terrorist bombings—or that Shas activists punched into computers the name and address of every single person who accepted one. Shas won ten seats in the 120-seat Knesset, making it the third-largest party and an essential partner in any coalition.

From the start, Deri was the pivotal party organizer. In his mid-20s, he had managed to become director-general of the Interior Ministry, a giant pork barrel that controls funds for local government. In 1988, he became interior minister. But by 1990, police were investigating allegations he had used the Interior Ministry to enrich both himself and party-linked institutions. After three and a half years, Deri—who was then serving under Yitzhak Rabin—was indicted. In a crucial precedent, the Supreme Court ruled he would have to quit the Cabinet while on trial. Despite Deri's dovish leanings, his party split with Rabin's Labor coalition, leaving it with a slim majority and a starkly secular, affluent image.

Neither Rabin nor Peres did much to repair that image. Labor ignored not only Sephardim, the Orthodox and the West Bank settlers, but also the huge wave of Russian immigrants. An economic boom made the well-off wealthier, but did not much help the poor, who

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fell even further behind. Netanyahu swung last year's election with the votes of the resentful. He and his spokesmen slammed the press as leftist. Although he does not himself seem at all devout, Netanyahu nevertheless talked of tradition and posed for a photo-op as he was blessed by Rabbi Kaduri.

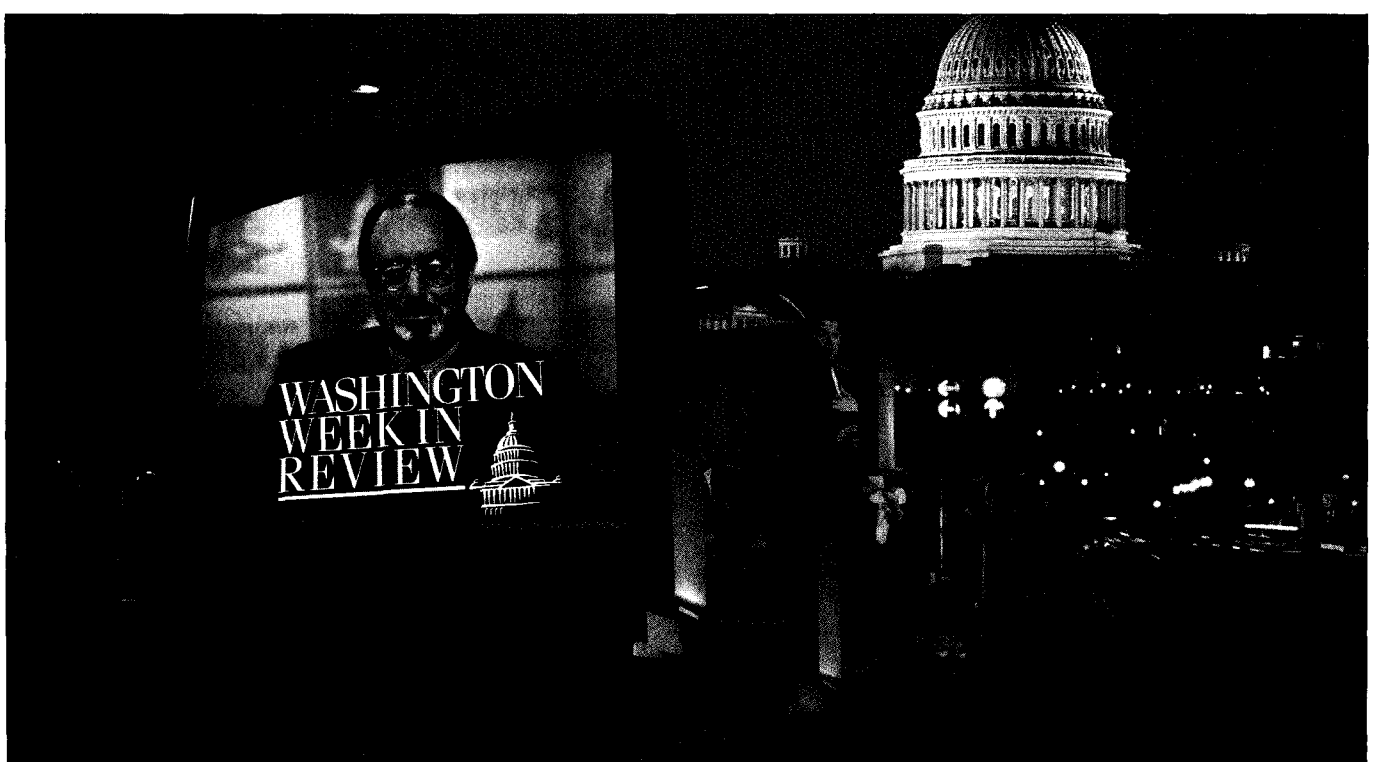
The Likud's leaders, European themselves, have always appealed to Sephardic bitterness. Netanyahu goes further, playing the outsider even within his own party. He has locked out more experienced Likud pols and concentrated power in a small group of unseasoned advisers and cronies. At the beginning of his term, he treated military and intelligence chiefs as Laborites, cutting them out of decisions. Playing to the clerical parties' dislike of an activist judiciary, he suggested "putting boundaries" on the Supreme Court.

Meanwhile, Deri's marathon corruption trial continued (and indeed is still underway). It is essential for Deri's political future that he be acquitted in this trial; although he has continued to control Shas, Deri cannot return to the Cabinet unless cleared of charges of moral turpitude, possibly through a plea bargain. Deri's need for clearance and Netanyahu's dependence on Shas support came together, the police alleged, in a bid to corrupt the government's authority to dispense justice. When, in December, the attorney general post opened up, Deri backed Bar-On, a Likud hack and a mentor of Justice Minister Tzahi Hanegbi—and opposed Netanyahu's idea of appointing Dan Avi-Yitzhak, Deri's own brilliant defense attorney. On January 10, Netanyahu rammed Bar-On's appointment through the Cabinet. Two weeks later, a report by Channel 1 that Deri had rigged the appointment set off the police investigation.

Whether either committed a crime, Netanyahu and Deri seem to share a misreading of the prerogatives of office. In Israel's early years, public propriety was far laxer. Political appointments, even to the quasi-judicial post of attorney general, were more acceptable. Government money flowed easily to party-linked bodies. But since the 1970s, independent attorneys general and the courts have imposed checks on executive power. The press, once party-controlled and passive, has become a feisty Fourth Estate. Both men seem to have ignored these changes, assuming they could do what was done in the old days by the people they despise.

The problem is they're not alone. Many Israelis regard today's talk of Western democracy, like yesterday's talk of socialism, as a glorified device for keeping them out. Deri's rabbinic supporters now accuse "elements in the police and prosecution" of "being driven mad by hatred of Sephardi Jewry." If the Supreme Court decides Netanyahu must be charged, many will regard the move as a judicial coup. Speaking to the nation after the prosecution's decision, Netanyahu painted the press coverage as a leftist bid to overturn the elections. Clumsy at governing, he remains a master at campaigning. And the smoldering rancor of the outsiders is there to inflame.

GERSHOM GORENBERG is op-ed editor of *The Jerusalem Report.*



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The GOP's billion-dollar script.

HOLLYWOOD SHUFFLES

By Romesh Ratnesar

It was two days before the Academy Awards, a seventy-degree March afternoon, and everyone in Hollywood was busy making arrangements to have their limos stretched and their stretch marks eased and their calls held and their girls called, and all the other hundred little details that make for a proper Oscars night. Well, not entirely everyone. On Buena Vista Street in Burbank, in conference rooms at the Walt Disney Studios lot, a couple of hundred power players were up to something more unlikely: a friendly (but quite serious) discussion of copyright protection and TV syndication laws with some men from Washington, D.C.—Arizona Senator John McCain, chairman of the Senate's commerce committee and presidential aspirant; Louisiana Congressman Billy Tauzin, head of the House's telecommunications subcommittee; and Fred Thompson, chairman of the Senate's government oversight committee.

For Hollywood mavens to spend a Saturday talking policy with Washington legislators is unusual, and for Washington legislators to journey to Los Angeles for any reason other than a fund-raiser is likewise out of the ordinary. But what made this meeting really strange was that the legislators were of a species almost never even seen in Hollywood. They were, God help us, Republicans. Lionel Chetwynd, a conservative writer-director who helped organize the conference, was quietly smug. "Not a bad marquee for a Saturday afternoon on the lot," Chetwynd said. "I think we opened a lot of eyes in Hollywood."

He may be right. For epochs a bastion of liberalism of the lefter and often goofier sort, Hollywood has lately awakened to find Republicans in its midst. Although Democrats in Washington and Hollywood are correct in insisting that the town remains a stronghold of the left, an emerging matrix of business and political interests has brought Hollywood and the GOP closer—closer, perhaps, than at any time since Herbert Hoover made MGM mogul Louis Mayer his first White House dinner guest. The romance has been piqued by the one thing that walks equally large on both coasts, money.

In the past several years, the entertainment industry has radically transformed itself. What drives the industry is no longer the simple imperative of producing lucrative films, but a more complex desire: to produce synergy, to maximize the number of routes to the consumer's heart and wallet, through film, television, video and the Internet. This sea change has spawned a series of gargantuan media deals: Disney and Capital Cities / ABC, Time Warner and Turner Broadcasting System, MCA and Seagram. The business of synergistic Hollywood is increasingly bound up with the business of Capitol Hill. Marketing on a global scale, Hollywood has realized that issues like the billion-dollar telecommunications law and U.S. trade policy with China have more impact on the industry than the box-office grosses of Jim Carrey or Demi Moore. And to safeguard its immense interests in what Washington does, Hollywood cannot afford not to do business with the men and women who control both houses of Congress. Which means, for the first time in more than forty years, conservative Republicans.

Eyeing the fund-raising potential thus suddenly at hand, these Republicans have in recent months noticeably quieted the anti-Hollywood vitriol that Dan Quayle and Pat Buchanan trumpeted in 1992, and Bob Dole clumsily reprised in 1996. Favorite anti-arts causes of the self-described revolutionary 104th Congress, such as defunding the National Endowment for the Arts and the Corporation for Public Broadcasting, are, in the 105th Congress, raised meekly and quickly snuffed. Eager for contributions (and for a touch of the glamour-by-association that Hollywood has largely reserved for Democrats), once-ostracized Republicans are embracing the glitzerati they were raised to detest: witness Newt Gingrich's public display of affection with certified liberal actor and NEA activist Alec Baldwin. "I wouldn't call it a realignment," industry lobbyist Tony Podesta says of the nascent GOP-Hollywood affair. "But it's definitely a reassessment."

The proof is in the pocketbook. In 1992, Democrats swamped Republicans in Hollywood, out-raising them by about $1.2 million in soft money, and by more than $300,000 in PAC contributions, according to the Center for Responsive Politics. Last year, however, these financial tides began to slowly shift. Though Democrats still received the lion's share of the industry's record $8.1 million in soft money donations, the amount going to the GOP more than quadrupled from 1992, going from $700,000 to $3 million. And, for the first time, Republican candidates netted more Hollywood PAC

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money ($1,635,544) than their Democratic opponents ($1,188,634). "During the 104th, they might have regarded us as something of a flash in the pan," says Representative Mark Foley, a Florida Republican who has pushed for a rapprochement with Hollywood. "Now that they see ... we're still in power, reality has set in for people in Hollywood. They are saying to themselves, 'We have to deal with them whether we like it or not.' "

The Republican comeback in Hollywood began to emerge shortly after the right's congressional victory in 1994. Within three months of the election, Motion Picture Association of America head Jack Valenti, a Johnson administration veteran and one of Washington's most formidable power brokers, convened a breakfast détente between Gingrich and moguls from MGM, Paramount, Time Warner and Sony, among others. Gingrich bounced out of the meeting extolling the goodness of the entertainment industry, and soon formed a twelve-person entertainment task force to begin soothing relations, appointing the rehabilitated TV-star-cum-Representative Sonny Bono as its chairman. "People realized you can't ... cast everyone in the industry as negative," says task-force member Foley. "Just because someone carries a film actor's guild card doesn't mean they're demonic."

DRAWING BY VINT LAWRENCE FOR THE NEW REPUBLIC

In the minds of Hollywood's corporate interests, the GOP Congress, for all its past faults, appeals in two ways. It embraces a pro-business, anti-regulatory agenda; and it isn't Bill Clinton. Agitation with Clinton peaked in late 1993, when the president, during GATT negotiations, capitulated to European Community demands limiting U.S. entertainment's access to European consumers. A bleary-eyed Valenti, who had been pacing in a nearby Geneva hotel room as Clinton cut the deal, emerged to tell reporters, "I feel very sad." For the next year, Valenti began directing industry money the GOP's way. "This community gave [Clinton] a zillion dollars," says Verna Harrah, head of the Cinema Line film studio, "and he totally screwed them."

And it isn't merely on business matters that some in Hollywood feel betrayed. The traditional Hollywood-Democratic alliance on social issues has frayed as well. Earlier this month, the liberal and powerful Hollywood Women's Political Committee disbanded, in part to protest Clinton's rightward retreat on domestic issues like welfare reform. Republicans also gleefully note that the movement to impose limits on sex and violence on TV sprouted from congressional Democrats. In 1993, liberal Massachusetts Representative Ed Markey held hearings denouncing television violence, floating the idea of a device to block out certain programs. That ultimately became a prized Clinton campaign prop: the V-chip.

In February 1996, Clinton summoned top television executives to the White House and cajoled them into agreeing to a self-rating system. When Democrats and children's advocacy groups criticized the eventual plan late last year, several GOP legislators, including Bono and Tauzin, rushed to defend the industry's efforts. "The Democrats lectured to the executives," says Podesta, "and the Republicans told them, 'You're a great American asset, what can we do to help you and grow your businesses?' A number of Hollywood executives who previously thought of themselves as Democrats thereafter defined themselves as non-partisan."

To be sure, the recent thaw in relations between Republicans and Hollywood has been far from complete. Many in the entertainment business are still smarting from the blow of Dole's electioneering harangues against the industry. "The 1996 campaign," says David Horowitz, the '60s radical turned neoconservative Hollywood activist, "was miserable for all of us." Indeed, as far as the town's biggest and most active political shakers are concerned, Hollywood is still Democratic turf. Andy Spahn, who handles the political dealings of Steven Spielberg, David Geffen and Jeffrey Katzenberg—the triumvirate that runs DreamWorks SKG and dumped $530,000 into DNC

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coffers during the last campaign—contends that, "if anything, the Republicans lost ground with Dole's hypocritical attacks on the industry."

Still, conservative klatches like last month's Saturday symposium on the Disney lot, once unimaginable, have become nearly commonplace. Five years ago, Chetwynd and Horowitz inducted the Wednesday Morning Club, an occasional power-lunch series for the town's conservative, wonkish set. The club has brought right-wing fixtures such as William Bennett and Robert Bork to Hollywood, drawing audiences of upwards of 200 people for its events.

Some industry conservatives envision a drama in which, as the power of aging Hollywood liberals like MCA's Lew Wasserman declines, the Republican Party lures the bulk of show business's younger, richer, post-ideological crowd. The 1998 election cycle, Chetwynd predicts, will see a "drastic increase" in entertainment money flowing to the GOP. Indeed, entertainment bosses have to some degree already laid down their swords in the culture wars. Over the course of the last half-decade, Hollywood realized the moneymaking potential of blandness. Shortly after Dole's campaign screed in 1995, Time Warner severed ties with its "gangsta rap" record label; Geffen had done the same in the early '90s, and many major pop music producers have begun releasing expurgated CDs to ensure their place on Wal-Mart's shelves. The big film studios have similarly bowdlerized many movies to satisfy Blockbuster Video, and have reoriented the character of their films in deeper ways, turning toward movies that notably reflect conservative, or at least Gumpian, values. Even the highest-grossing movie released last year, the wildly gory but jingoistic *Independence Day*, was one that Dole liked. "It's very possible that the younger crowd is becoming more conservative," says Harrah, the industry's biggest GOP soft-money donor. "Look at *The People vs. Larry Flynt*. Hollywood didn't go for it. I was surprised at how the community turned its back on it."

By softening their edges and showing their willingness to toss cash the GOP's way, the industry's players have ensured that few legislators in either party will do anything to antagonize Hollywood; both parties have come to rely on the reservoirs of big-business money for their survival. Which means that Republican leaders' recent silence on the moral failings of show business will be exceeded in volume only by bipartisan silence on the *business* of show business. This is no small matter, especially at a time when the sources of entertainment in all media are increasingly controlled by the hands of a few corporate megalopolies. The romance between the GOP and Hollywood isn't just a match made in movie heaven; it's synergy. And if it means that the rest of us now have to witness Democrats *and* Republicans shouting hosannas about Hollywood's virtues while we endure the numbing mediocrity of Hollywood's products—well, that's entertainment. •

The new media long for the good old days.

RAISING CAEN

By William Powers

SAN FRANCISCO

In its year-end issue for 1996, *Time* magazine selected as the year's best website an online magazine called *Salon*. For those who follow such things, the choice was a bit surprising. All the middlebrow press organs, including *Time*, had been treating the launch of Microsoft's *Slate* magazine as the signal event in Internet journalism last year. Now *Time* was conferring mainstream validation on another, less famous webzine, which is produced here by a covey of former newspaper people.

A month later, on February 1, Herb Caen died. Caen, who was 80, had written a newspaper column about life in this city for nearly sixty years, mainly in *The San Francisco Chronicle*, though he spent eight years in the 1950s with *The San Francisco Examiner*. The papers are journalistic rivals, but their owners have a joint operating agreement, and the two newsrooms have long occupied two connected buildings at 5th and Mission Streets. The buildings are a short walk from the old commercial precinct where *Salon*, *HotWired* and countless other online media ventures have lately clustered, an area known as South of Market or, more recently, the Multimedia Gulch.

But other than geography, San Francisco's newspapers and its online publishing culture would seem to have very little in common. Among media, the Internet is a baby just learning to talk and use its limbs, all inarticulate energy and curiosity, while the city's two newspapers are like one of those weary, old married couples who can no longer recall the point of their desiccated

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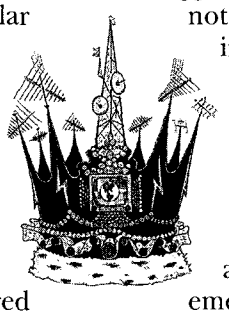
union. Offering a thin mix of national stories picked up from the wires and homegrown journalism sadly lacking in energy and originality, the *Chronicle* and the *Examiner* are constantly derided by the locals. If the country's major metropolitan dailies were ranked for journalistic quality, these two would appear at or near the bottom of nearly everyone's list. They are an object lesson in old-media mistakes.

In some ways, Herb Caen (pronounced "cane") was the personification of old media, the world in which news is something that's printed on paper and heaved on the back of delivery trucks before dawn. He churned out his columns using the two-finger method on an ancient Royal typewriter. Some readers called Caen a poet—a highly arguable contention—but the little stories and observations that made up his column were based on shoe-leather and telephone reporting of the most prosaic old-school variety. Caen moved around town, talked to people and reported the things he saw and heard in the form of brief items separated by ellipses. "Wondering muse: is there still time to cancel those $950 trash 'receptacles' planned for The New & Improved Market St.?" he asked at the beginning of one such item in March 1975. He also wrote regular mood pieces on the city as a place that one inhabited not just physically but sensually, as in this kicker from a 1960 column: "The timelessly San Francisco smell—clean and right—of wet eucalyptus in the Presidio that guards the past, two jet fighters climbing fast into the murky sky to guard the present that is always tense, midnight lights burning high in the downtown skyscrapers as yesterday's trash is cleared away in readiness for the future that will soon rise out of the East Bay Hills.... What a town. Gee, what a crazy town."



Unlike cyberjournalism, which is not tied to a particular physical community—the medium itself is literally placeless, its audience everywhere—Caen and his work were emphatically local. And while he delighted San Francisco, he also wielded so much power there that, in a few sentences, he could set the city's political, commercial or social agenda. "No other newspaper columnist has ever been so long synonymous with a specific place," obited *The New York Times*. "... [I]n the city, and no one ever doubted what city he was talking about, Mr. Caen enjoyed the status of a beloved Boswell by the Bay."

This was no posthumous exaggeration. When San Francisco celebrated Herb Caen Day last June, some 75,000 people showed up for the festivities, which included a parade and the rechristening of a stretch of sidewalk along the waterfront as Herb Caen Way. The last time the city had hosted a homage of this sort was the previous summer, when a mere 25,000 gathered to honor another hometown icon, Jerry Garcia. The Grateful Dead guitarist had to die to get his civic tribute, but Herb Caen himself attended Herb Caen Day, basking in a kind of adulation that has been accorded no other American journalist alive today.

So, although Caen worked in the style and methods of the old media, he was in some mysterious way an exception to the failure of those same media in his hometown. The mystery lies in the inescapable fact that Caen's columns were, especially in his latter years, rather insipid stuff: artless litanies of news tidbits, dumb jokes, society chatter, banal philosophics and plugs for his favorite politicians and restaurateurs. To anyone who has never lived in the Bay Area, the column's popularity was baffling. Still, San Franciscans of every imaginable stripe read Caen, and today speak with awe about the magnetism of his work. It was as if he remembered some deep trade secret that the newspapers had forgotten. And so he had. For a few minutes every morning, he made people feel good about belonging to a particular place.

It might seem odd that a media-impoverished city which idolized a voice out of journalism's past should give rise to some of the leading lights of the new media. But talking to people in several corners of San Francisco media, one begins to see why. The struggle of old and new media to win audiences today is not so much about newsprint versus digital impulses as it is about the definition of community. Caen rose here in the 1940s because his column expressed a somewhat idealized, but also reasonably real, conception of what his city was about. And he endured because he kept that conception of community alive for readers, even when it had lost its validity. *Salon* and the other new media ventures have emerged from the same city, and are equally products of its culture. But they are trying to make it at a time when the meaning of community, here and elsewhere, is much less certain. And they are doing so in a medium that fundamentally rejects the entire idea of a community rooted in shared physical space. In their struggle, they are a microcosm of the essential dilemma of the new media.

"Caen was a guy who was living what he was writing about," says *San Francisco Chronicle* Editor William German, who arrived at the paper in 1940, just two years after Caen. "Then, what he was writing about was San Francisco culture, which included a writing colony, a jazz colony, the glitzy or non-glitzy restaurants, or the inside of City Hall and what's making this government here work.... He just picked up a helluva lot of dope."

I met German, a courtly man of 78, in his office off the *Chronicle*'s newsroom, where the lighting is dim, the ceilings are high and the past feels very present. I had asked to interview him about journalism in San Francisco after Herb Caen, but he ended up telling me a lot of stories from the old days. In the early '40s, he said, he and Caen were members of the *Chronicle*'s bowling team, which bowled at 1:30 or 2:00 in the morning, after the last deadline. During this period, it happened that Caen met a showgirl who worked at the Golden Gate Theatre, a vaudeville house where the headliner was a certain Professor Lamberti, "who did a funny xylo-

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phone act." Caen and the showgirl ran off and got married, German says, and then "we made her an honorary member of the bowling team, mostly I think because she bowled in a tight sweater and added a lot."

A dated little story, perhaps, but it says something about the relationship between a newspaper and its city. Fifty-five years ago, young reporters didn't repair after work to the health club and the first available Stairmaster; they bowled with small-time vaudeville performers. The writing of Caen and reporters of his breed reflected the city life in which they were then immersed, which sounds and reads like it was rougher, smokier and funnier—and simply had more character—than the sauvignon blanc San Francisco of today.

When I talked to German it had been only weeks since Caen's death, but the editor had already received hundreds of letters from fans, many suggesting ways to keep the column going. Why, some urged, couldn't the editors just collect the tips that people sent to Caen's office, choose the best ones and string them together in Caen's three-dot style? Some enclosed copies of letters they had received from Caen—thank you notes for tips, replies to fan letters—four or five decades ago. Only a handful of the letters were from people requesting that their subscriptions be canceled because of Caen's demise, German said (there is talk that the *Chronicle* is worried about a big dropoff). German took out a handwritten, three-page letter from a couple in the Sacramento area who had been paying $300 a year to get the paper delivered there, just to read Caen. German read part of the letter aloud to me: "I think we should say thanks for the countless good times, and the pleasure of having Herb with us for over 28 years."

Pleasure. Newspapers and magazines figured out a long time ago how to make a lot of money in the "content" business: produce good work, stuff that gives people so much pleasure they'll pay for it, and print it up in close proximity to pricey advertising. So far, no one has figured out a similarly reliable way to make a lot of money publishing content on the Internet, because no one has been able to convince enough people that the content one can read on the Internet is worth paying for. In the short time since the Internet became popular, the public has shown that it's willing to buy products through this new medium only when it offers advantages over buying the same products the old way. So people are happy to buy flowers through a website (unlike ordering on the telephone, you can see an image of the arrangement before you buy it), and airline tickets (you peruse the schedules and prices yourself, and there's no waiting for the next available agent). Hordes of sports fans visit ESPN's website for the most current scores and stats. But, generally, people are reluctant to pay subscription fees to read online magazines and newspapers.

This is because the advantages are unclear, and the disadvantages are impossible to ignore: slow image resolution, sudden server disconnects and other technical

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annoyances, plus the inescapable fact that reading words on a $3,000 piece of machinery is just not as much fun as perusing a sheaf of smartly designed pages that can be held in any position, folded in half, carried from place to place, blithely left on a beach blanket and replaced for no more than a few bucks. So far, reading on the Internet is not only not the technological advance it was supposed to be, it's pure retrogression.

Thus, while there are countless online magazines and news-oriented sites, run by everyone from the most obscure zine publishers to the giants of the old-media world, few are making a profit, and every other day seems to bring a new story of disappointment. When *The Wall Street Journal* started charging last year for access to its "interactive" online edition, only about 10 percent of those who had been using it for free signed up. After online readers of *Slate* showed an unexpected disinclination to become paying subscribers, the magazine shelved its plan to start charging. Politics Now, the high-profile website of political information run by ABC News, National Journal Inc. and The Washington Post Co., recently closed down after only nine months (like almost all such websites, it was losing money).

The websites that get tens of millions of "hits" a day and bring in the big advertising money are not the online newspapers and magazines. They are the sites that people use to navigate the Web itself, such as Netscape and the sites of the leading "search engines," which go by names like Yahoo!, Lycos and InfoSeek. Content sites have not yet figured out how to draw the eyeball traffic that consistently visits these utilitarian sites. There is one large exception: pornography, in forms ranging from the mild to the rawest imaginable, is booming on the Internet, and people spend lots of time visiting, and lingering, at *those* content sites. But the online stroke businesses don't show up on the lists of ad-revenue leaders, because the companies that run them don't make most of their money from ads. They make it by charging people for the pleasure of looking at naked bodies.

What, then, would cause the public to change its mind about online content? Does the Internet lend itself to a particular kind of published communication for which people are hungry? What sort of website would attract droves of devotees, and the advertisers who want to reach them? Web publishers are trying to answer these questions, but so far none has hit on a golden formula. Even websites offering a designedly digital emphasis, such as the popular ClNet, a leading source of cyberspace news, are not yet profitable. Surely as technology becomes easier to use and more affordable, a lot more people will go online and the market will expand. There is constant speculation that some technological innovation will set off a content boom, the latest sensation being the so-called "push" technology popularized by a company called PointCast. In the world of push, customized information is delivered to the customer's computer (rather like a newspaper on the front porch), obviating the need to go looking for it on the Web.

While such developments tend to come from Silicon Valley, in San Francisco the emphasis is on the content itself, the search for a successful online publishing model. Some mimic old-media publications, transferring the essential conceit of a magazine or a newspaper—the layouts, the typefaces, the voices—straight to the screen. Others are trying to devise new ways for people to come together and exchange information.

Though *Salon* calls itself a magazine, it is consciously based on another old-media model, the newspaper. The idea is to emulate not the newspapers of the present but the newspaper philosophy of long ago. "There are things that new media can learn from old media that old media's forgotten," says David Talbot, *Salon*'s 45-year-old founder and editor (and brother of TNR senior editor Margaret Talbot). "How to tell a story, how to do colorful commentary. I think newspapers, daily newspapers, have become so corporate, so bureaucratic, so politically correct—all these things have sucked the life out of them. The Internet can exploit that, take advantage of that, by building a different kind of newsroom."

I met Talbot in *Salon*'s newsroom, a cubicle-divided space much smaller than any major newsroom of the old media. In 1995, both Talbot and Gary Kamiya, *Salon*'s executive editor, left *The San Francisco Examiner* to launch their online magazine, which was designed to revolve around ideas, and especially books. Talbot had been the paper's arts and features editor, while Kamiya had worked under him as both an editor and a writer.

Their impetus for leaving the newspaper, they told me, was a series of events in the early '90s that made life at the *Examiner* increasingly unattractive. Kamiya, who's 43, says quitting was hard because "newspapers are cradle-to-grave security, insofar as they have ironclad unions that are virtually unbreakable." This is true, but as it happens the union played a key role in an event that helped both men decide to leave: the acrimonious 1994 strike of *Chronicle* and *Examiner* union members. "The strike was very debilitating," says Kamiya, who went on strike (Talbot, who was in management, did not). "It was kind of a sad episode. It ended without satisfaction on either side. It left the papers, and probably particularly the *Examiner*, even more shaky than before and demoralized everyone."

There were other problems. The paper was increasingly isolated from the community, they said, a problem symbolized by its decision to fire its live telephone operators, so readers calling in with tips couldn't reach an editor or reporter. More urgently, the paper's very survival was in question. Though the *Examiner* is owned by the Hearst Corporation, a stronger company than the *Chronicle*'s family-controlled parent, as a business it is much the weaker of the two papers. With a circulation that hovers around slightly over 100,000 (in a metropolitan area of 750,000), it reaches only one-fourth as many readers as the *Chronicle*, except on Sunday, when the companies

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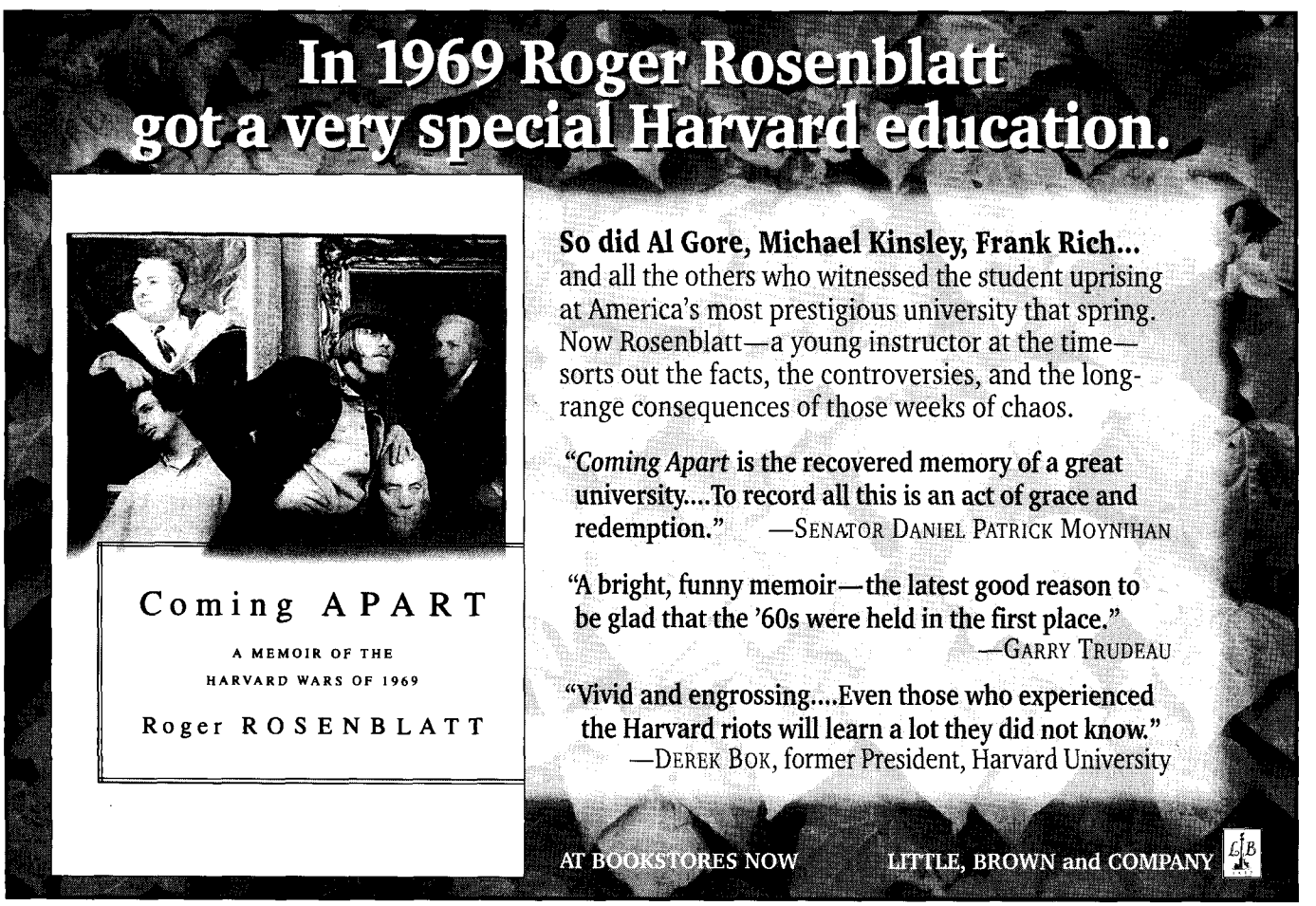
publish a joint newspaper. The papers' joint operating agreement is structured in a way that would allow one paper to acquire the other under certain conditions, and after the strike there were constant rumors that the *Examiner* was going to be swallowed up.

Then, in early 1995, shortly after the strike was settled, *Examiner* Publisher Will Hearst left for a new-media startup. Like his grandfather before him, William Randolph Hearst, this Hearst has a taste for lively journalism, and he had stocked the newsroom with what Talbot calls "non-traditional journalists.... They were from magazines, they were nuts like Hunter Thompson, they were drunks, they were colorful people." Hearst, says Talbot, "was a problematic leader, but at least he was charismatic and fun, and he actually assembled a really unique and colorful newsroom." Talbot saw Hearst's departure as an epochal event, the end of the line for San Francisco's newspaper culture and the beginning of a new media culture. In Hearst's wake, the *Examiner* newsroom hemorrhaged talent to the new-media culture. Talbot launched *Salon* in October 1995 with five other *Examiner* staffers, and two more have since switched over. Among the émigrés were some of the *Examiner*'s best writers and editors, including Kamiya, theater and film critic Scott Rosenberg, television critic Joyce Millman and foreign/national editor Andrew Ross. *Salon* now has about thirty employees and, having lost its early backing by the troubled Apple Computer, is supported by the Adobe Systems software company and a leading high-tech venture capital firm.

Hewing to its newspaper model, *Salon* recently made the jump from publishing new material a few times a week to putting up a new edition every day. It is faithful to the newspaper idea in other core ways as well. It seeks, in the Herb Caen tradition, to build reader excitement and loyalty around a group of talented writers, not all of whom are known quantities. So alongside such established national names as Camille Paglia, Anne Lamott and James Carville, *Salon* has given marquee billing to such writers as a wicked humorist named Cintra Wilson, also from the *Examiner*, and recent discovery Courtney Weaver. Talbot, who worked at *Mother Jones* before the *Examiner*, says he has "a deathly fear of group-think journalism," and though the readership has a lot of West Coast left-liberal readers, he is committed to "shaking those people out of their smug self-satisfaction." He has brought in writers who are outside the bounds of standard mainstream liberalism, most notably the unclassifiable Paglia and the ex-left, conservative political writer David Horowitz. The roster's political breadth may not be mirrored among *Salon*'s readers, who seem to be lefties. Recently, *Salon* ran an interview with Representative Maxine Waters, the Los Angeles congresswoman whose views on social policy, the CIA's alleged cocaine dealing and other matters are decidedly to the left of most members of Congress, and most Amer-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icans. But in the magazine's discussion area, called Table Talk, all those who posted messages on the day of the piece were self-professed Waters fans.

"I think the best newspapers," Talbot says, "are built around personality, columnists who make you feel like you're part of that world, whatever they're writing about.... So what we're trying to do is to build a daily addiction with our readers the way the *Chronicle* built a daily addiction with Herb Caen."

Talbot says he views the current moment as a great opportunity for Internet journalism, and expects the medium to become a fount of great new writing. With publishing companies and Hollywood studios playing an ever-safer game, consulting accountants and focus groups and marketing experts at every turn, the culture is impoverished. "There's no life in it, no originality," he says. "The Internet comes along, and I launch *Salon* for a fraction of what it would have cost us to launch it with print.... And foreign investors aren't asking me every week, 'When are you going to turn a profit? What do the focus groups say, what do the focus groups say?' "

But Talbot knows that, just over the horizon, there's a darker reality coming. "These are the golden days, and the bar that is going to be raised is the cost of marketing, because there's such a glut already of things on the Web." For startup publications to make it online, they'll have to forge alliances with media giants like Microsoft and Time Warner, he says. Only the lucky few will break out on their own. Talbot hopes *Salon* will be one of these.

Among the high-end online magazines, *Salon* seems to be doing as well as anyone. In addition to the prestige of good reviews, he points to signs that its readership is growing. Every time a reader visits a particular page of the magazine, that visit is counted as a "page view," and *Salon* reports the totals to advertisers as evidence of its popularity. The number of page views has been steadily rising and just broke 3 million per month (a meaningless number outside the online world; Talbot says *Salon* has 75,000 registered readers). "We've got to double that," Talbot says, "and then double it again, to stay with what I think the advertising agencies want by way of eyeballs."

The eyeballs, however, don't come easily. Talbot and Kamiya say they find that, in online publishing, having the word "sex" in the title of an article has a dramatic effect on readership. Regular readers of *Salon* cannot have missed the increasing frequency of what Kamiya calls "the magic word." One recent column ended with the invitation, "How has your sex life changed since the birth of your child? Discuss it in Table Talk." And a recent feature was titled "The Circumcised Have More Fun." In the headlines and subject choices, a premium is placed on attitude, sensation and cheek. Which means that, although *Salon* is often delightful, some days it is, like a friend who's always "on," a little exhausting.

The other way to keep people interested, Talbot says, is by offering them additional services and information. One service that has raised some eyebrows is what *Salon* editors call "the buy function." When readers of book and music reviews read the end of a piece, they are transferred to a form on which they can order the reviewed product from Borders Books & Music, a *Salon* advertiser. Talbot says there is "a very tall firewall" between "the commerce function" and "the editorial function," and that most of the zine's reviews are generally negative anyway.

In another effort to increase reader loyalty, he says, *Salon* is putting together a consumer incentive package: discounts in bookstores, discounts on tickets and *Salon* T-shirts. "I think that, just like a PBS station, a certain percentage will be willing to pay, say $35 a year, to become a member of the *Salon* club."

Everyone who still pays attention to the old media knows they have lost their vitality. There was a time, not so long ago, when a newspaper arrived with an authentic air of immediacy: here was a fresh dispatch from the throbbing world. The nice thing about newspapers, though, was that while they brought the distant places and people to your doorstep—and so conferred on you a kind of proxy cosmopolitanism—they were generally produced not far away, and were rooted in things local. The publisher was some town notable, the editor a guy you might run into on the street.

For many reasons, that world is now gone. The immediacy of newspapers was largely supplanted by the electronic media's ability to deliver all the news all the time. The local quality of papers was lost as chains like Gannett and Knight-Ridder bought up newspapers and assembled them as so many line-items on the corporate balance sheet. Along the way, journalism became a profession of people who live not to chronicle the lives of a particular city or town but to pursue the ideal of the national media career.

Newspapers know they're out of touch—readership is down in most places, and the thrill is palpably gone from newsrooms—but they have applied all the wrong remedies. Endless reader surveys, demographic studies, polls, focus groups and editors' conventions have resulted in newspapers that feel dutiful, afraid, soulless and wedded to a set of fixed and frequently incorrect ideas about life and society. To read a metropolitan newspaper—take your pick of the quality dailies—is to encounter utter spiritual deadness. In a last desperate grab to win back readers, some journalists have signed on to a strange new orthodoxy called civic journalism, which would turn papers and magazines into ghastly lesson books, in which those same rootless journalists tell the people which "issues" really matter to "our" community, while prescribing for each some sort of policy "solution" that might have been cooked up at the Kennedy School of Government. This is the opposite of journalism that reflects a true sense of community—organic, physically rooted, slightly eccentric, exploring and celebrating the quotidian life of one particular community. This was the sense of community that Herb Caen evoked, and to which he was one of the last remaining links.

So some, like Talbot and Kamiya, have left old jour-

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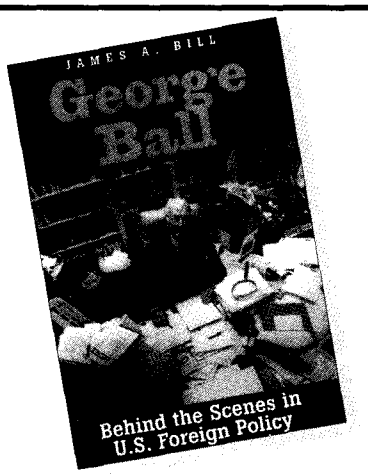
nalism to attempt a revival of the old values elsewhere. Others have stayed behind to try resuscitating the dying beast. One of the latter is Phil Bronstein, who, at 46 years old, is the executive editor of the *Examiner* and a good bet to become the next legendary character of San Francisco journalism. Powerfully built, with black hair and fierce dark eyes, he tends to wear blue jeans with a starched white shirt, a tie and cowboy boots ("I don't own shoes"). A former foreign correspondent who worked in the Philippines, El Salvador, Peru, Burma, Cambodia, the Middle East and other places, he is a throwback to a time when journalism was an adventure, a calling that attracted not dour scolds but troublemakers and crusaders.

One time Bronstein dropped a pumpkin off the roof of the newspaper building to see if it would explode. A few years ago, he was at a meeting in the paper's editorial board room with California political consultant Clint Reilly, when there was some kind of disagreement between the two men. What exactly happened, and why, is very much in dispute, but the result was that Reilly's ankle was broken; it required hours of surgery and the implantation of a metal plate and nine screws. There was a lawsuit, which the *Examiner* paid an undisclosed amount to settle. Bronstein told me he still can't believe people were so horrified by the donnybrook: "I mean, this is a city where publishers used to *shoot* each other!"

More recently, the two papers were battling over their coverage of a small pet alligator named Fred that was discovered living in a lake near the Presidio. As the competition for entertaining alligator stories escalated, Bronstein, a certified scuba diver, put on a wetsuit and appeared at the lake to go hunting for the alligator (the police dissuaded him). He is, in short, one of the rare living exponents of the roguish journalistic tradition of William Randolph Hearst, whose first newspaper was the *Examiner* (which might explain why, after the Reilly incident, Bronstein kept his job).

Sitting with Bronstein in his smallish, well-lit office, you get the impression that he's now in the fight of his life. He's been in the editor's job five years, and basically they've been hell. There was the strike, then Hearst's resignation and the ever-present rumors that the *Examiner* is going to fold. Still, he says he's working every day to return the paper to the kind of journalism epitomized by the young Herb Caen, who, Bronstein says, hung around at "the underground places and the gangster places and the fences and the jazz musicians and the dopers. There was just a sense that he really got around and appreciated and chronicled the life of the city from soup to nuts."

Bronstein is drawn to bold tabloidish headlines and dramatic photos. He has brought in a cartoonist named Don Asmussen who applies an acidic, subversive sensibility to local politics. And he has started a new column by a San Francisco cab driver, called "The Night Cabbie," which has been getting heavy resistance from certain quarters: "The people who have a politically correct bug up their ass, they don't like it because he talks about



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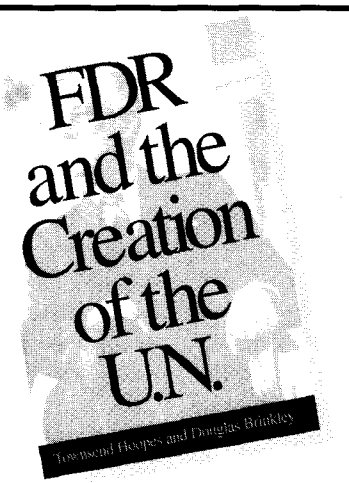

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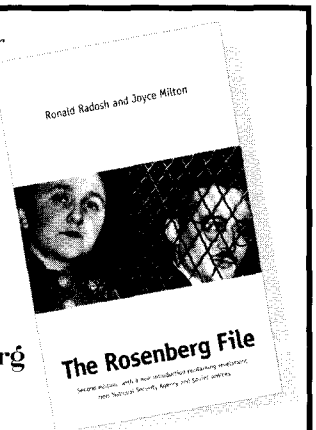

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hookers and pimps and drug dealers. He's probably a little homophobic and a little misogynistic. *He's like a cab driver*! So there are people in this office who hate it."

He works some days, he says, from 7 a.m. to midnight, trying to make sure his efforts to make the paper bolder are not thwarted by more timid souls. "Newspapers to a large extent ... have become very dull," he argues. "They lack personality. What I am trying to do here ... is create a group of personalities so distinct they give the paper a personality."

But it's not just the paper that's his problem—it's the city. "San Francisco," he says, "has allowed itself to become—we're all responsible—very narrow, conservative, rather uptight, structured, unwilling to take risks.... "

Here, he launches into a story about a crazy artist he knew when he was a young reporter. The man used to "build these monstrous machines that would belch fire and destruct and shred each other, and I mean it was wild, and he would give these kind of impromptu performances. He ended up blowing off his hand once, and then he constructed a new one for himself with metal fingers.... He was a really wild character. And then he and his wife had some huge fight, and she tarred and feathered his car in North Beach. We could use a few more of those."

Bronstein is probably right about San Francisco. By all accounts, there used to be more outrageous people here, on both sides of the journalist's notepad. Listening to his tales of going up against the culture of mediocrity, both inside and outside the paper, it's easy to see why Talbot and his crew decamped. Bronstein says the *Salon* defections were "painful" for him and left a hole in the paper's cultural coverage. He wishes them the best, he says, but he's not sure they will succeed in defining a new kind of community journalism. "There's a way in which online is not a community except online," he says. "So my own view is you're lacking a certain component."

If anyone could make the new media succeed, you would expect it to be the people behind *Salon*. They are smart; they have seen the horrors of old journalism at its worst; and they are determined not to make the same mistakes. Still, they and their online colleagues are attempting to revive something in cyberspace that may be beyond the abilities of even the most determined journalists and the most powerful machines: that sense of community that Herb Caen got and that newspapers have lost. This is the core question for cybermedia; it is a question of definition, of category. Can you do in the ether of no particular place—of cyberspace—what newspapers used to do in products that were written, printed and sold in, and for, a particular place? "One is a disembodied community, one was very embodied," Kamiya posits. "But in a sense it built a community either way. It's a similar enterprise."

Is it? As Herb Caen showed, the most successful newspaper writing was not high-level intellectual discourse, but basic stuff: people came to a newspaper to find out if the big murder was solved, whether the new restaurant on Maple Street was any good, and what good gossip that funny columnist had come up with now. It didn't matter whether you felt you had tastes or ideas like those of the editors or the other readers of the paper, because in a sense you had everything in common: the town or city where you lived. A newspaper wasn't a club you wanted to join, it was an expression of a club you were already in.

Virtual communities are another matter. Since they cannot be based in physical togetherness, they are based in other kinds of togetherness. They are communities of ideas and attitudes. And the enduring challenge with such communities (of which THE NEW REPUBLIC is one) is that you have to keep convincing people that they want to belong—because they share your ideas, your slant, your sensibility. The audience's commitment to a virtual community is more elusive, harder to gain and harder to keep, than a city-dweller's commitment to the physical space in which he dwells. The customers of a virtual community publication haven't decided to live in a place and make their lives there; they have filled out a subscription card or typed a World Wide Web address. No T-shirts or bookstore discounts will allow *Salon* and its ilk to do what the old media did for people, because they can't.

When Herb Caen died, *Salon* published a moving, elegiac appreciation of the man by Gary Kamiya. "On Saturday afternoon," it began, "I walked blearily out of my apartment on Nob Hill, chasing some carbonated sugar water after a night that had begun at a South-of-Market dive and ended seven hours later in North Beach. *The San Francisco Examiner* was lying on the doorstep. I glanced at the headline, 'HERB CAEN DIES,' it read."

Kamiya went on to limn Caen's craft: "He brought a deadline poetry to the life in the streets, the roistering and gossip and tragedy of 700,000 lives. His column was the city's agora, its Roman forum. The scoops, the sparkling one-liners, the praise and derision, the endless dish he served up brought the city's people together, if only for 10 minutes over a latte. But he also brought a tough, unabashed lyricism to the beauty of the place itself. The city, for him, was neither just a pretty postcard nor a source of three-dot anecdotes for his daily thousand words—it was a living entity, a place that at once included and transcended its inhabitants' destinies."

Salon's decision to publish this piece was an odd one. Although the magazine is based here, it's not really a San Francisco publication. Rather, like all things cyber, it is at once everywhere and nowhere, a site that transcends its inhabitants' destinies only because it is utterly removed from and indifferent to those destinies. Though Kamiya's words were beautiful, to *Salon* readers who didn't follow Caen—which would be most *Salon* readers—the piece probably didn't mean much. Unless they happened to notice what was really going on: new media was planting its lips on the corpse of old media, wistfully—and hopefully, as if to catch the elusive spirit before it vanishes for good. •

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THE HARD QUESTIONS

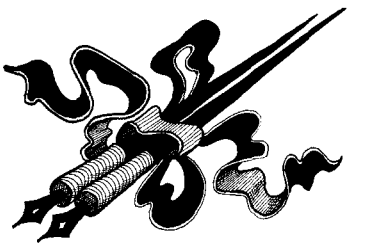
Homegrown

The death of Albert Shanker, the remarkably effective leader of the American Federation of Teachers, has refocused attention on the great New York City school strikes of 1968 and the community school boards that emerged in their wake. The massive disruption of the strikes resulted in a new system of school government in New York City, largely shaped to satisfy Shanker. But, in the end, it also gave a modicum of satisfaction to the black leaders and their liberal allies who were demanding that the schools be managed by local communities. That system expired shortly before Shanker's death. Last December, the New York state legislature, acting after recurrent scandals involving community board members (some had taken bribes from aspiring principals), stripped the boards of most of their power.

Despite such scandals, though, the issue of community control is far from dead. The struggles of 1968 sought to bring urban government closer to the people it affected. For the schools, this meant an arrangement that gave parents more say in their children's education. At the time, the city's middle-class Jews and Italians had no great quarrel with the schools. Their children did well enough, and they provided most of the jobs in the school system's bureaucracy. It was struggling blacks and Puerto Ricans who were most upset by the highly bureaucratic system and who saw the solution in more direct democracy, in schools run by local boards elected by parents. With the support of the Ford Foundation, three communities soon set up experimental school boards. One of them quickly fired a group of teachers, many Jewish (as indeed were so many of the teachers in the system then), whom the board felt were unsympathetic to its aims and to black students. Strikes called by Shanker's union closed the school system down again and again.

"The 1968 battle over school decentralization in an obscure Brooklyn district called Ocean Hill-Brownsville ripped apart New York City as nothing has before or after," John Kifner wrote in *The New York Times*, commenting on the end of the school boards' power. "It played an early role in the deterioration of relations between blacks and Jews. New York liberals ... were split into warring camps. Albert Shanker rose in stature from local union chief to hero to some and anti-hero to others."

Now, after nearly thirty years under local elected boards, New York City's schools are again under a strong chief and an appointed central board. Sadly, we are in an age in which we place more faith in powerful central administrators than in community control. Mayor Rudolph Giuliani fought to gain greater control over the schools; Mayor Richard Daley of Chicago has already achieved it; and Mayor Richard Riordan of Los Angeles, after his second electoral victory, is expected to seek it. Should we expect anything to change as a result? The past, alas, tells us no.



Thirty years ago, the left attacked centralized bureaucracies for their rules, their distance from the schools and their inability to improve the achievement of minority groups, in particular blacks. The left demonized the union and its single-minded leader, who it claimed was so fully committed to the interests of the teachers that those of the students took second place. Today, interestingly, the attack on school bureaucracies comes from the right. Conservatives offer the most fervent support for an odd descendant of community control: charter schools. These infant institutions are now flourishing in a number of states that permit parents and educational entrepreneurs to start schools. Though funded by the government, they are free of local bureaucratic controls and operate, therefore, more like private schools. Backed by conservative think tanks and business interests, charter schools promise to improve the achievement of minority and low-income students.

But charter schools raise many of the same fears that community control did thirty years ago. Can we trust local groups to run schools independent of centralized bureaucracies? Won't we find corruption as public money is distributed to various private groups? Won't bizarre school programs suddenly turn up funded by taxpayers' money?

The editor of this magazine, Michael Kelly, attacked charter schools in December. In "Dangerous Minds" (December 30), Kelly reported on an altercation at the new Marcus Garvey School in Washington, D.C., a charter school, which, as its name suggests, is committed to black nationalism. In the altercation, several students reportedly assaulted a white female reporter and threw her out of the school. "Charter schools, and similar ideas like the use of vouchers to pay for tuition in private schools, enjoy support from the right and the left for essentially the same reason," Kelly wrote. "Conservatives like charter schools because they think the schools' autonomy will allow the teaching once again of conservative virtues—old-fashioned education, discipline, religious instruction. The race-and-gender left likes charter schools because autonomy will allow the teaching of *its* values: Afrocentric schools for blacks and feminist schools for girls, and so on." Actually, the race-and-gender left does not actively support charter schools. They do well enough in the public schools, though it is true that charter schools in black neighborhoods will generally place strong emphasis on Afrocentric education.

Of course, the unions are suspicious of such autonomy. Their members may lose jobs as parents desert public schools and patronize the new charter schools. Understandably, Shanker reprinted Kelly's attack in his weekly advertisement in *The New York Times* shortly before his death. Both have a point: charter schools may teach nonsense. But at least the nonsense has the support of parents, who can always shift their children to the public schools, or from one charter school to another. Charters come closer to restoring parents' control over the schools than any tinkering with big-city school bureaucracies, and that is a virtue in its own right. Furthermore, there is good evidence that schools that link parents, teachers and children in a common enterprise, accepted by all, are the most effective. Competition should ensure that the new charter schools deliver what parents most want—a good education for their children. Besides, there is a way to judge whether these schools perform well: national standards and national tests. Even if the schools teach nonsense, the public—and the parents—can at least find out if their students can read, write and calculate.

Shanker opposed vouchers and was wary of charter schools. But his most statesmanlike position was his steady support for national standards and national tests. That is the answer to Kelly's concern over charter schools—not, as some suggest, preventing these schools from coming into existence and maintaining power with central-office bureaucrats.

NATHAN GLAZER

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BOOKS & The Arts

Stanley Kauffmann on Films

Disneyland and Elsewhere

Two months ago we got *Le Samourai*, an icicle of a picture about a Parisian hit man (Alain Delon), a soulless technician who kills people for pay. Now, so to speak, Walt Disney responds. **Grosse Pointe Blank** was produced by Hollywood Pictures and is distributed by Buena Vista Pictures, two of the tentacles of the Disney octopus. This new film, too, is about a hit man, a technician who kills people for money. But with a Disney difference. This picture is a sunburst, a bright and breezy romantic comedy, and, of course, it ends happily. If Walt were still alive—and who says he isn't?—he would have been proud. His people licked all the nastiness right out of murder.

John Cusack is the hit man. In our first glimpse of him, he calmly knocks off a bicycle messenger with a sniper's rifle. He then visits his psychiatrist, who knows his client's profession. When Cusack complains about a sense of unease, the doctor suggests that he attend his high-school reunion in Grosse Pointe, Michigan, an event that Cusack has mentioned. "Don't kill anybody for a few days," says the doctor. "Just see what it feels like." This might be a funny line in a revue sketch, but we have already seen a man killed—with a very real rifle—by Cusack, and, as a result of this hit, a lot of other people were furiously shot down.

Cusack goes to his class's tenth reunion. (His character's family name is Blank. Hence the film's ho-ho title.) There, in bouncy high-spirited style, we see him greet a former girlfriend and some pals. A romance that was abruptly broken off ten years ago is resumed, with plenty of breezy interplay. When anyone asks Cusack what business he is in, he says he was in the army for five years and is now a professional killer. This produces yuks all around.

Plot maneuvers bring other killers to Grosse Pointe to liquidate Cusack. There's a wild shootout in a convenience store, from which he escapes; he kills an assailant in the high-school locker room on the night of the reunion dance (and, without question, two local pals help him put the body in the high-school furnace); and the day after the dance there's a gargantuan firefight between him and his enemies in his girlfriend's house. He survives, unhurt. The girlfriend, at first horrified when she learned of his profession, is now reconciled because this last slaughter saved her father. (A killer's target for some nebulous business reason.) At the end she and Cusack, whom we have seen murder about eight people and who killed enough before we met him to make him wealthy, drive off in a roadster toward married bliss.

All the shootings, all the bullets ripping through walls and so on, are presented in the tone of a Tropicana commercial. Cusack plays the whole thing, or tries to play it, like a light comedian, though he always seems like a supermarket manager in a local amateur production. Cusack's sister Joan is his secretary, a killer's loyal Girl Friday. His girlfriend is Minnie Driver, who has mislaid the charm she had in *Circle of Friends*. The psychiatrist is Alan Arkin, who might have been Judd Hirsch, who so often might be Alan Arkin.

Are psychiatrists under a vow of secrecy like priests in the confessional? Is this doctor free *not* to report his client to the police? The question is not too heavy for this supposedly spun-sugar picture because the killings are shown so vividly. The people killed in this picture stay dead. Yet this doesn't bother the psychiatrist or Cusack's girlfriend or, for that matter, Cusack. Not one of these matters bothers the authors of the screenplay, Tom Jankiewicz, D.V. DeVincentis, Steve Pink and Cusack himself. They just got this midnight-in-the-college-dorm bright idea, a hit man at his high-school reunion, and apparently thought that the very brightness of the idea would take care of any problems that might arise.

It doesn't. The picture is ludicrous, not funny; disgusting, not smart.

On the same planet, believe it or not, is the Anthology Film Archives. This admirable cinémathèque in Manhattan was founded years ago by Jonas Mekas, eminent as a maker, promoter and distributor of avant-garde films. He was joined a year or so ago by Fabiano Canosa, formerly the head of the (abandoned) film series at the Public Theater. Under Mekas-Canosa the AFA shows three programs a day, seven days a week, with the programs alternating in a kind of repertory schedule.

Most of the films shown at the AFA are far from my own taste and interest, but

FILMS WORTH SEEING

Chasing Amy. *Urban and suburban young people in and out of love. Raunchy but spirited. Written and directed by Kevin Smith, with authenticity and zing. (Reviewed 5/5/97)* **The Designated Mourner.** *An extraordinary piece by Wallace Shawn, neither a conventional film or play. (It was written for the theater.) Three speakers describe, more or less casually, the end of civilization. The most casual is Mike Nichols, excellent. (3/24/97)* **Hamlet.** *Kenneth Branagh's third Shakespeare on screen. Some intrusive directing but some splendid acting. (1/27/97)* **Hollow Reed.** *English. The gay, divorced father of a small boy seeks custody of his son, to protect him from abuse by his ex-wife's lover. Well done. (5/5/97)* —**SK**

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all of them are serious explorations of the resources and possibilities of the art. Interspersed with new and old avant-garde works are films that are thought to be consonant with the spirit of the AFA even if more traditional in form—a recent retrospective of Buñuel, for instance. And sometimes the AFA shows valuable new films that once might have found conventional distribution but that, in these straitened days, are passed over.

Two examples of neglected films that got at least a few showings from the AFA. In January they had the American premiere of **Ulysses' Gaze**, by the Greek writer-director Theo Angelopoulos. This is, I think, the tenth feature by the 62-year-old Angelopoulos, who has a large reputation abroad and is almost unknown in the United States. His films are long, slow, ruminative, often political, sometimes a bit baffling, but they are always the work of a genuine, gifted artist. And they are always ravishing merely to *see*. Between Angelopoulos's eye and that of his marvelous cinematographer, Yorgos Arvanitis, there is never a trite or dull composition.

Without Mekas-Canosa, *Ulysses' Gaze* would not have been shown here. In it Harvey Keitel, speaking English, plays a Greek-born American director who returns to Greece to find some old reels of film that have significance for him. His three-hour search takes him through several Balkan countries, all the way to Sarajevo, in the course of which odyssey he perceives much, as we do too—and not merely factually. It's one of Keitel's deeper performances.

Marcello Mastroianni was in an earlier Angelopoulos film—*The Beekeeper* (1986)—which leads to the second example. In April the AFA presented one of Mastroianni's last films, made in Portugal in 1995—**Pereira Declares**, directed by Roberto Faenza. Set in Lisbon, it takes place during the years of the Spanish Civil War. Pereira is the literary editor of a newspaper whose life is defensively patterned to shut politics out. By chance he gets involved with an activist young man and woman who change his point of view. (The version I saw was in Italian, with subtitles. All the Portuguese actors were dubbed in Italian, as was the French actor Daniel Auteuil.)

The theme of the film is hardly fresh: as soon as we know the initial situation, we know what's going to happen. But it happens quite warmly, because of Mastroianni. And, without the AFA, we would not have had that warmth, from one of the last pictures by one of the premier actors in film history. •

Robert Brustein on Theater

The Descent of Man

The plays of Eugene O'Neill have always presented problems, even for his admirers. His passion for large epic themes has rarely been accompanied by any great capacity to articulate them coherently, while his conceptual control, his effort to dramatize the ideas of thinkers like Marx and Freud, has always been shaky at best. As a result, intellectual critics, Lionel Trilling and Mary McCarthy among them, have usually been inclined to dismiss O'Neill as a pretentious windbag, and even the respectful Joseph Wood Krutch was forced to conclude that the dramatist had "genius without talent," by which he meant O'Neill lacked the verbal imagination to achieve his stated goals. Sadly enough, the playwright secretly agreed. If we are to believe his surrogate, Edmund Tyrone, O'Neill always knew he was incapable of expressing his oceanic feelings in coherent speech: "I just stammered. That's the best I'll ever do," Edmund confesses to his father in *A Long Day's Journey Into Night*, after trying to describe an epiphany at sea. "Well, it will be faithful realism, at least. Stammering is the native eloquence of us fog people."

That cruelly honest, deeply poignant passage is about the closest O'Neill ever comes to writing dramatic poetry. Most of the time, all he is able to do is, well, stammer. In **The Hairy Ape**, O'Neill tries to make a virtue of his speech defects, creating a character who can barely speak at all. Yank, the stoker, is one of America's earliest inarticulate heroes, a near relative of Stanley Kowalski in *Streetcar*. But, whereas Stanley's crude proletarian idiom contains its own special spark and humor, Yank's mind is blunt and blank, his dialogue virtually impossible to read. "I start somep'n and de woild moves!" runs a typical passage. "It—dat's me—de new dat's moiderin' de old! I'm de ting in coal dat makes it boin; I'm steam and

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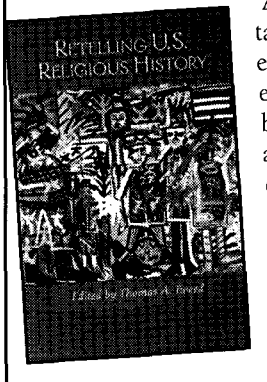

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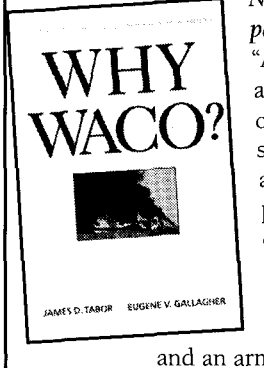

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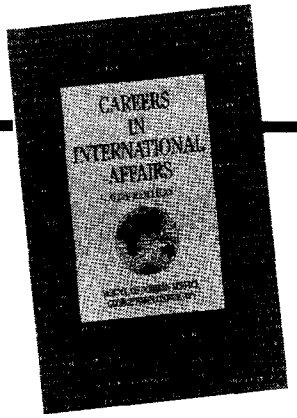

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oil for de engines; I'm de ting in noise dat makes yuh hear it...! I'm de muscles in steel, de punch behind it!"

This kind of exclamatory "toity poiple boids" language, in which Big Ideas are enunciated in a parody of Hobokenese, has kept plays like *The Hairy Ape* off the American stage for decades. O'Neill's unprocessed Expressionism hasn't helped much either—most of the characters in this play find their identity only as large abstractions.

A German production of *The Hairy Ape* some years ago by Peter Stein proved such an enormous success against these odds that I wondered if the only way to perform the play in this country was to translate it into a foreign language and then translate it back into speakable English. The current Wooster Group production at the Selwyn Theater offers another solution, which is to act the play so rapidly, through a razzle-dazzle of such technical wizardry, that you can barely make out the words. Oddly enough, the strategy works. O'Neill's underlying pulse and power, the dark side of his inarticulateness, have rarely been so potently revealed. Apparently, the best way to receive this work is not to hear it.

The Hairy Ape was written in 1921, not long after O'Neill had completed his series of one-act sea plays. It is related to them in kind if not in length, taking place primarily in the fo'c'sle of a large oceangoing steamer. There, the stokers, "hairy chested with long arms of tremendous power, and low receding brows," keep the ship's engines purring. Yank, the chief Neanderthal, is content with his place in the universe until a society lady named Mildred Douglas, paying a slumming visit to the engine room, is so appalled by his appearance and behavior that after calling him a "filthy beast" she faints dead away.

Yank's sense of belonging is severely shaken by this incident. Having "fallen in hate" with Mildred, he leaves the ship to confront the girl and discover his proper place in the chain of being. He visits Fifth Avenue, where he is first mocked, then thrown into prison. Later he tries to join the I.W.W. (the Wobblies), who accuse him of being a government infiltrator. Yank ends up in a zoo where he is hugged to death by a gorilla, the only creature with whom he can feel any spiritual kinship. This ham-handed anecdote, an early study of alienation plunked inside a clumsy effort to dramatize Darwin's *The Origin of Species*, would challenge and daunt even the most fearless performers.

Not the Wooster Group. Under the precisionist direction of Elizabeth LeCompte, this company has long enjoyed a well-earned reputation for doing deconstructed, unauthorized versions of anthology American plays. Among them have been Wilder's *Our Town* and Miller's *The Crucible* (a production that so enraged the author that he threatened to get an injunction to keep it off the stage). By comparison with these earlier efforts, LeCompte's production of *The Hairy Ape* seems relatively tame. The vanilla ice cream Americana of Wilder's play, for example, was interlaced with steamy pornographic movies and a blackface minstrel show.

The Wooster Group's *Hairy Ape* is already mired in controversy. You enter the Selwyn Theater past a group of picketers protesting that the presentation is busting various theatrical unions. The Wooster Group defends itself by claiming to be a "self-governing collective" that has never been a party to union agreements. This is unquestionably true. There is no doubt that the company's integrity, not to mention its longevity, has been inseparable from its commitment to common internal goals, rather than to external controls and contracts. For years, the Wooster Group has offered its work to a tiny audience in a small, hard-to-find space in Greenwich Village. Critics have been admitted, but they are not permitted to review the plays in progress. (I once got lost coming to see a Wooster Group show, arrived five minutes late, and found the door locked.)

Now the Wooster Group is performing a limited run of *The Hairy Ape* in one of those reconditioned 42nd Street theaters, with the backing of commercial producers. They obviously hope to attract larger audiences with the lure of the participation of the movie star Willem Dafoe, a longtime company member, in the title role. What effect this move will have on the future of the group remains to be seen, but the present production is unsparing, uncompromising. The night I saw it there were so many outraged walkouts I thought I was back in Cambridge.

But a large number remained to cheer, and, indeed, there is much to cheer about. With the aid of dazzling klieg lighting by Jennifer Tipton, a thunderous sound score by James "J.J." Johnson and John Collins, and a metallic erector set by Jim Clayburgh that rises and lowers like a steel trap, you look down on a claustrophobic space as dehumanized as its inhabitants. The event begins with looped videos of a prizefight that continue throughout the evening as a kind of leitmotif of combat and violence. Slowly, the sooty-faced characters loom into view, rolling with the pitch and yaw of the ship, pressed into squatting positions by the metallic overhead cage. Dafoe's Yank is the sootiest of them all, his white eyes piercing through the grime like demented headlights, his white teeth bared in a monstrous grin.

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The appearance of Mildred (Kate Valk) and her aunt (Peyton Smith) in the midst of this nautical *Walpurgisnacht,* mouthing O'Neill's tin-eared version of upper-class speech ("How naïve age makes one!"), becomes a marvelous burlesque turn. Mildred strips to her negligée and starts prancing into the engine room wearing oversize ballet slippers that make her look like a member of the ostrich chorus in *Fantasia.* Her overstated expressions of disgust after beholding Yank's repellent mug climax in an exaggerated balletic swoon.

In a yellow spotlight saturated with smoke, the stokers strip themselves naked to wash off the grime. And Yank, looking even more simian now that his features are visible, his reddish hair falling over his shoulders like a filthy kepi, begins his long odyssey in search of the woman who insulted him. At times barking into a handheld mike, at others glowering through a video screen, Dafoe's Yank perambulates the urban landscape like some exiled alien from a primitive planet. Confronting the Wobblies—a coterie of wiseguys in green visors—he offers to blow up the Douglas Steel Works. The Wobblies respond by turning his video image negative. Dafoe's acting never deviates from a grotesque intensity. No wonder so many women walked out. They had come to see a matinée idol and found the monster from the black lagoon.

In the climax, against a video of a desolate moon, Kate Valk puts on a fake gorilla head and prepares to crush this hapless man to death. Yank has discovered his primal crime ("I was born"), and there is nothing left for him now but extinction. Still yammering about his failure to fit in ("I'm trou. Even him [the gorilla] didn't tink I belonged"), Yank experiences his *Liebestod* in the arms of an equally inarticulate primate, as the rest of the apes celebrate his end in a crazy dance. Bells ring, the lights dim. "And perhaps," O'Neill writes in a final stage direction, "the Hairy Ape at last belongs."

In this production, *The Hairy Ape* at last belongs to the rank of playable plays, having found its apotheosis in a dazzling experimental production that uncovers its secret heart. Many critics, and most of the public, see no value in directorial intrusions into the cloistered precincts of sacred masterpieces. But gifted directors such as Elizabeth LeCompte, and creative companies such as the Wooster Group, manage to show us how the spirit of a work can sometimes best be realized by ignoring the letter—or, in the case of *The Hairy Ape,* the unletter—of the text. Curiously, O'Neill always considered this one of his most important if least appreciated creations. In 1944 he wrote, in a letter to Theresa Helburn: "It remains

MARTIN E. MARTY

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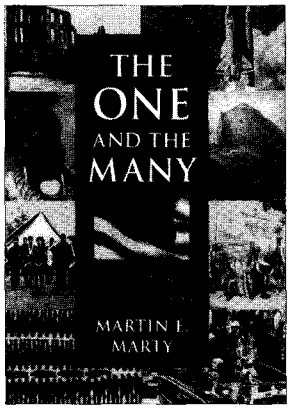

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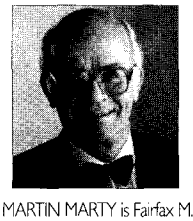

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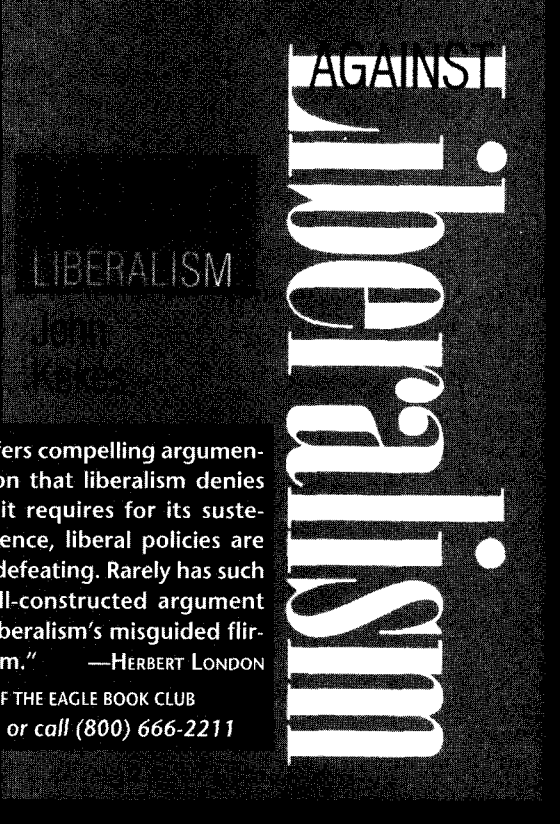

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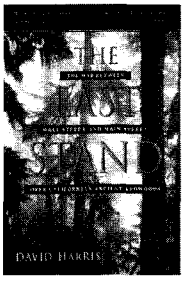

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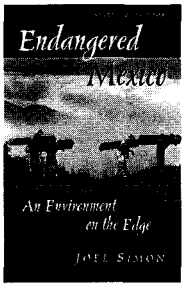

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one of my favorites. I have an enduring affection for it—always will have—and an enduring respect for it as drama, the more so because so few people have ever seen what it is all about." Now that the Wooster Group has removed the obstructions that have blocked our appreciation, audiences are at last able to feel, if not to hear, "what it is all about." I suspect even O'Neill would have been pleased. •

He Is Finished

BY JAMES WOOD

The Gospel According to the Son by Norman Mailer

(Random House, 242 pp., $22)

Jesus warned us about Norman Mailer. There will be imitators, false prophets, fake messiahs, he said. Here is Mailer, who has been crying in the wilderness, and preparing the way with boasts: "I'm one of the fifty or one hundred novelists in the world who could rewrite the New Testament," he told an interviewer. He has written the life of Christ as if told by Christ, and he feels that, like Christ, he is half man and half something else—a kind of celebrity-centaur. Mailer can identify with the son of God:

> And I thought this one [*The Gospel According to the Son*] was fine because I have a slight understanding of what it's like to be half a man and half something else, something larger. Believe it if you will, but I mean this modestly. Every man has a different kind of life, and mine had a peculiar turn. It changed completely at twenty-five when *The Naked and the Dead* came out. Obviously, a celebrity is a long, long, long, long way from the celestial, but nonetheless it does mean that you have two personalities you live with all the time.

So the nonsense has begun early. With Mailer's better books, it is easy to separate the nonsense from the talent. It is like playing only the white keys on a piano. But the very melody of this book is foolish. "For those who would ask how my words have come to this page," Mailer has Jesus say in the novel's prologue, "I would tell them to look upon it as a small miracle. (My gospel, after all, will speak of miracles.)" Everything that is wrong with *The Gospel According to the Son* is concentrated in this promise: in that phrase "after all," which is blithely compact about something that should be felt and explained, and suggests to us that Jesus will wink and nudge his way through his own life; in the verb "speak of," whose antiqued veneer pledges a book of reproduction language; above all, in the implication that Mailer will not write a novel, but carve a gospel.

In a sense, the four gospels of the New Testament are enemies of the novel. They are not narratives, they are witnessings that occasionally fall into narrative. The life of Jesus is not conceived by the writers of the gospels as the story of an individual whose fate, unknown until the moment of reading, may interest us. Jesus did not live the life of a character in a modern novel. He was a story already told, and he felt this. He existed to fulfill the prophets; he is the completion of evidence. The whole machine of persuasion that is the secular, modern novel—verisimilitude, a believable character, an uncertainty about meanings and endings, the pacing of time, the description of place—is irrelevant. The task of the gospels is not to persuade novelistically, but to convince forensically. In the eighteenth book of *The City of God*, Augustine writes that Jesus, "in order to make known the godhead in his person, did many miracles, of which the gospel Scriptures contain as many as seemed enough to proclaim his divinity." "As many as seemed enough to proclaim his divinity": there were other miracles, suggests Augustine, but the gospel writers picked enough to win their case. Reality was merely the court of the sublime.

The proclamation of divinity has nothing to do with the establishment of credibility as we understand it in literature—the stoking of interest in the belly of the reader. We cannot be persuaded to believe in divinity as we are persuaded to believe in a work of art, and Christian art does not, on the whole, attempt to do this. The halo seen so often above the head of Jesus marks the moment at which verisimilitude, the persuasion of reality, has not just broken down, but has become irrelevant: he is holy, and that is the end of it. A verbal equivalent of the halo, in the gospels, is the ellipsis between verses. The "And" or "Then" with

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which so many biblical verses begin is not merely abrupt; it demotes fullness of storytelling as beside the point. The narrative does not progress realistically; it is snatched from reality to reality. There is no reality between the verses, just a constant divinity. The effect is like watching, as a child, one of those big institutional clocks whose minute hand does not invisibly coast but jerks at intervals:

> When he was come down from the mountain, great multitudes followed him.
> And behold, there came a leper and worshipped him, saying, Lord, if thou wilt, thou canst make me clean.
> And Jesus put forth his hand, and touched him, saying, I will; be thou clean. And immediately his leprosy was cleansed.

Disastrously, Mailer borrows this style that is so inimical to the movement of a novel. Many of his sentences begin with "And" or "Then." The pith of reality has been spat away, and in its place is a spastic simulacrum of biblical style. Mailer uses a strange, abandoned version of King James English, as if a rival monarch had broken into the text and stolen all its gold. His "biblical English" is simple modern prose with occasional attacks of nostalgia: "I hardly knew why, but I said to Peter, 'Do not enter into temptation.' My soul was sorrowful unto death." Or this: "Then the two fish gave up more than twice two hundred small morsels."

Mailer has decided—not without reason—that the crooked vitality of King James English lies partly in its gross specificities, the little whorls of metaphorical detail that enable the Psalmist, for instance, to write that the eyes of the rich "stand out with fatness." Mailer strives to compress the language into fierce oddity, but the effect is often gibberish: "His face was like a ravine and small creatures would live within," Jesus reports to us, about the face of John the Baptist. "His breath was as lonely as the wind that passes through empty places," again of John. "Still, I could hear laughter creep out of their feet," Jesus says of a crowd in the temple. When the Devil comes to tempt him in the wilderness, Jesus can smell his evil: "I could also perceive how greed came forth from his body. For that was kin to the odor that lives between the buttocks." (If this is what greed smells like, think what the product of greed smells like.) The key to the bad smell of that sentence is not the idea of greed having an odor, nor even the odor's drastic placement, but the words "kin" and "lives"—both swirlingly portentous.

Mailer's Jesus, hobbled by this deprived patois, emerges as a simpleton. He is the Prince Myshkin of Judea. He sounds like an antique imbecile. Mailer is forever plunging his Jesus into platitudes—an attempt, presumably, at biblical "wisdom." "Rare is the calm that is long free of disturbance" is one of his ponderings. "I thought of how King Herod had wished to kill me. What a bloody creature was man." "How I hoped that the angel spoke the truth! For then I would be like a light sent into the world. Yet men seemed to love darkness more than light." This may be Mailer's idea of how a truly good man thinks.

The problem is the whole conception of the book. In Mailer's plan, Jesus is telling us this story from heaven; what he recounts has already happened to him. Indeed, in the book's most absurd moment, Jesus provides a kind of epilogue—as in those movies that, just before they roll the credits, tell what happened to everybody after the story ended—in which he lets us know that everyone, including himself, is doing fine:

> I remain on the right hand of God, and look for greater wisdom than I had before, and I think of many with love. My mother is much honored. Many churches are named for her, perhaps more than for me. And she is pleased with her son.
>
> My Father, however, does not often speak to me.

But retrospection—Jesus looking back on his life from the safety of heaven—is

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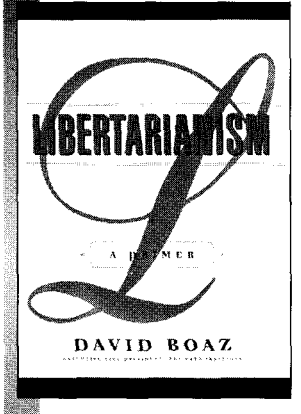

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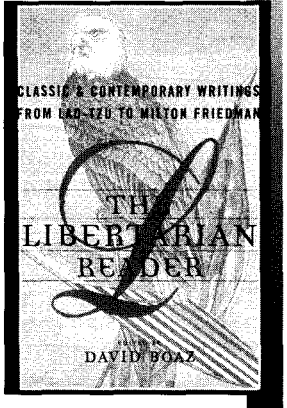

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an especially bad way to tell a familiar story whose momentousness is already known to most people. It is hard enough for a novelist to find a fresh cutting from this story. When Jesus first said that it was harder for a camel to go through the eye of a needle than for a rich man to enter heaven, the phrase was not rusty. Mailer's Jesus further removes the novelistic from the book. It is unwise, given the dangers inherent in this enterprise, to have Jesus say, of his own birth, "As all know by now, there was no room at the inn." Yes, we all know—and so the writer must do something new with it, not complain lazily at its familiarity.

Freed from the pretense of telling a tale that is unfamiliar to him, or a tale full of adventures that have to be shared for the first time, Mailer's Jesus is constantly anticipating and foreshortening his story. "I was yet to learn that I would care about sinners more than for the pious," he hints early on. At Cana, having turned water into wine, he turns aside and confides: "That was the first of my miracles...." This is sheer ineptitude on Mailer's part. It destroys what tang of discovery the narrative might have had, and makes it impossible for us to believe Jesus's self-doubt. For Jesus has already marked his route. About halfway through the book, Peter says to Jesus, "You are the Christ," and Jesus tells us: "I shook my head. Even at this moment, I could not be certain." At this, we laugh in disbelief. Mailer's Jesus has been dropping hints everywhere: "I could hardly see myself as the Son." Mailer's Jesus does not act like a man suddenly chosen by God to be the Messiah. He acts like a fool who cannot keep a secret.

Suddenly one realizes why *The Gospel According to the Son* reads like a children's book. Jesus lived and died, but he survived to tell the tale! No real harm came to him. At the book's climax, as Jesus hangs on the cross, he has a little thought: "God was my Father, but I had to ask: Is He possessed of all Powers? Or is He not? ... If I had failed Him, so had He failed me. Such was now my knowledge of good and evil. Was it for that reason that I was on the cross?" This is a moment at which Matthew is powerful, like a true storyteller: the Roman centurions dividing up Jesus's garments; the soldier offering Jesus a vinegar-soaked sponge; the thieves and bystanders challenging him to prove himself by coming down from the cross. But Mailer mangles it; mangles it as a novelist should not. These calm clouds are not the thoughts of a man going through his final agony. We do not believe Mailer's Jesus here, any more than we believe him a few pages later when he insouciantly tosses out: "Indeed, it is true that I rose on the third day." At such moments, a baldness of narration that at first merely hinders plausibility seems the emblem of something else: a baldness of mind, an idleness, a vacancy.

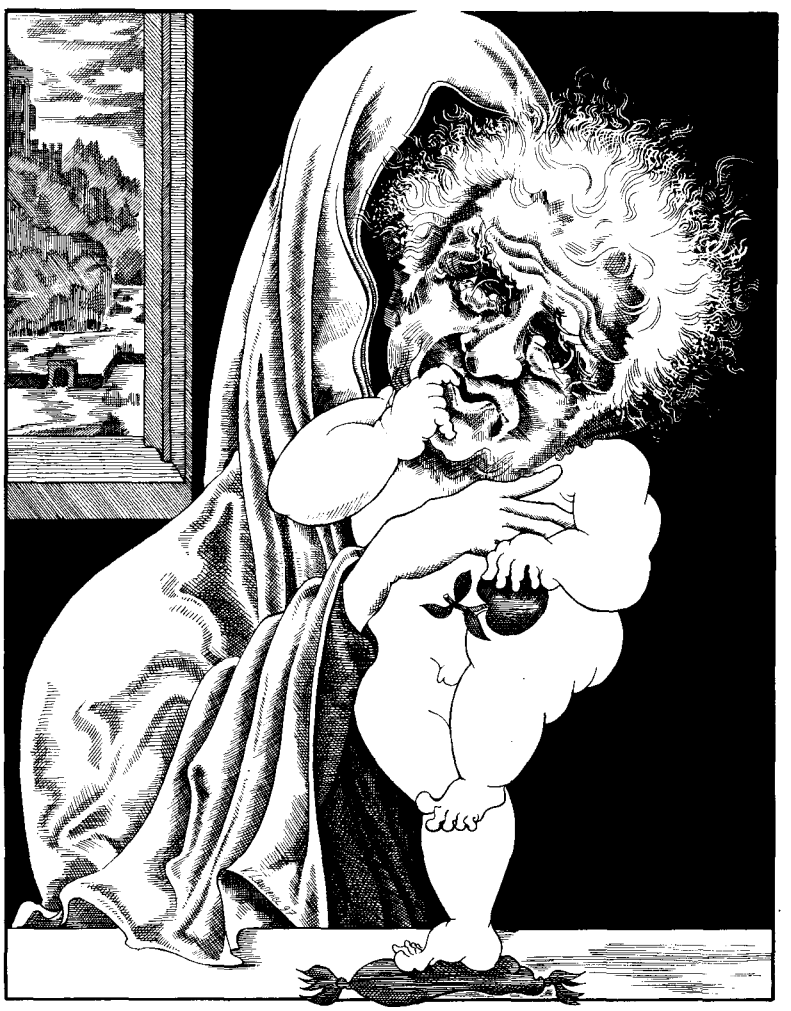
Mailer's novel has been criticized, in *The New York Times*, for reducing Jesus, for knocking him off his "celestial throne." But this is to criticize the book for being a novel, something it is not enough of. It would have been perfectly proper if Mailer had knocked Jesus off his throne, as a serious writer should try to do. But perhaps one celebrity cannot do this to another celebrity. So instead Mailer has attempted a "gospel," full of holy wind. His Jesus is not a human being; he exists only in the frail rigging of Mailer's insistence that he is alive.

How might Jesus the man be portrayed? Ernest Renan, in 1862, wrote a biography of Christ in his *Life of Jesus*, which had a powerful impact on modern secular thought:

> *He is tempted—he is ignorant of many things—he corrects himself—he is cast down, discouraged—he asks his Father to spare him trials—he is submissive to God as a son. He who is to judge the world does not know the day of judgment.... In his miracles we are sensible of painful effort—an exhaustion as if something went out of him. All these are simply the acts of a messenger of God.... He was not sinless; he has conquered the same passions that we combat; no angel of God comforted him, except his good conscience; no Satan tempted him, except that which each one bears in his heart.*

This is, essentially, Mailer's Jesus. Renan was a Catholic who lost his faith. His book is a piece of learned kitsch, soft with surmise and invention. It is a disingenuous book, in which Renan, conscious that he is dismantling Christianity as he turns it into a myth, nervously compensates by idealizing Jesus. Stripping him of supernaturalism, and of his claim to be God's son, Renan turns the worship of this diminished orphan into a sickly poetry: "The highest consciousness of God which has existed in the bosom of humanity was that of Jesus ... that which all elevated souls will practise until the end of time." (A similar nervousness can be felt in Matthew Arnold's idealizations of Jesus.)

But Renan's portrait does allow for a man to emerge from the gospels. It is a picture that the doctrine of the incarnation must allow, of course. If Jesus was man as well as God, then he doubted, was tempted, was provoked into anger. Mark tells the story of Jesus cursing a fig tree because he wanted to eat and it had no fruit. The tree withered. Bertrand Russell took this as one of several examples of



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Jesus's imperfection. But what enrages the atheist should sting the novelist.

The rise of historical biblical criticism, of which Renan's book is a late bloom, generated an interest in the lean Jesus of reality, as opposed to the fuller Jesus of worship. There was a secular tilt, which freed the writer. Balzac wrote an extraordinary story in 1831 called "Christ in Flanders," set in the Middle Ages, in which Christ appears as a mysterious stranger on a boat, and calms a storm. In *De Profundis* (1897), Oscar Wilde apotheosized Jesus as the greatest artist, and described the gospels as "the four prose-poems about Christ." D.H. Lawrence wrote "The Man Who Died," a Nietzschean fantasy in which Jesus does not die on the cross but survives at the last minute. Alive, he realizes that he has never really lived, that his philosophy has been life-denying and death-obsessed.

These visions, some pious, some not, are characterized by their great interest in the real; that is the rich looseness of modernity for such artists. Indeed, the genre of the "mysterious stranger," the Christ-like figure who suddenly appears and shatters domestic reality (a genre that includes Tolstoy's "What Men Live By"), takes the interaction of the divine and the real as its very subject. Insofar as the men and women in these stories spend their time trying to uncover the true identity of their visitor, they are actually applying themselves to the "mystery" of incarnation, that impossible imbrication of the godly and the human. That is the true mystery of these visitations.

But Mailer has, apparently, no interest in reality. Whole scenes disappear in a sneeze. Mailer is so besotted with phony grandeur of diction that he refuses to animate. Here is the scene, in full, in which Jesus, just before his death, is being abused by the guards: "The guards beat upon me. These words by Caiaphas had removed all fear that I might yet bear witness against mistreatment. So they felt free to beat my face." Nothing more! Far from knocking Jesus off a throne, Mailer is blindly, gratuitously, unwittingly reverent. He follows the gospels at times word for word, scene for scene, inventing or changing little. His Jesus is born in Bethlehem; is saved from Herod's slaughter of the children of Bethlehem; is found by his parents, at the age of 12, speaking with the elders in the temple; is baptized by John; turns water into wine at Cana; raises Lazarus from the dead; heals the leprous and the blind; anoints Peter as the rock of his church to come; walks on water and calms a storm; is crucified and rises on the third day. This is the Jesus of the gospels, but the gospels tell it much better, and they spare us the devil's odors. Mailer's imitation is a kind of poor understudy for a performer who is never sick.

Mailer's loyalty to holiness is what is wrong with this book. Recently he was asked if he believed if Jesus was the Son of God. "As a novelist, I do. I believe Jesus was the Son of God. You can't be a serious writer of fiction unless you believe the story you are telling.... Intellectually, I don't feel that miracles are impossible—if I did, I could never have entered the imaginative framework in which the book is written.... I was able, as a novelist, to believe that the events in the New Testament occurred. So I could write about them as if they were real." Mailer seems to think that, in effect, he became a Christian while writing this novel. But this is a curious idea of imaginative belief, a misguided literary equivalent of method acting, which severs the novelist's connection with his everyday imagination. While writing, he is a Christian. While breakfasting, he is a Jew. But why can a writer not describe something that he does not believe? This is surely the very principle of otherness in fiction. In what way did Stendhal believe in Jesuit priests, or Woolf believe in the lighthouse? Those were actualities whose reality was a kind of temptation, not a belief,

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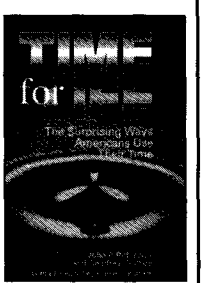

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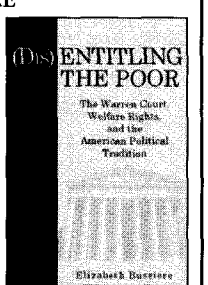

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and whose reality had to be explained in fiction.

Perhaps Mailer is simply being noisy. Perhaps he is confusing identification with belief. But notice that what is holy to Mailer are not miracles, but writing: it is the "imaginative framework in which the book is written" that becomes sacred, and writing a kind of religion. In order to write, says Mailer, one must "believe." This is in keeping with his generally athletic and operatic approach to literature, which he has always seen as a prizefight of the spirit. Yet the failure of his novel is precisely its inability to make real such things as miracles. An artist struggles to make something real when he is not sure that others will believe. Is it not possible that Mailer's "belief" short-circuited that struggle, made it irrelevant? If miracles exist, then why labor to evoke them? If Jesus is the Son of God, then why convince anyone?

Mailer is not a novelist here; he is a very late, very bad pseudepigraphist. Though he does not mean to, he returns the novel to a piece of biblical writing. His belief turns him into a religious "enthusiast" for fiction at the very moment at which he should be a novelist. It is a dereliction familiar in Mailer's career. In order to write about these events "as if they were real," he tells us, he had to believe that they were real. Believing them to be real, he does not labor to make them real. He has already done the imaginative sweating at home. Why share it? But of course he has done no sweating at all.

It is possible to credit Jesus's humanity without irreverence. Equally, it is possible to credit Jesus's divinity without believing in it. Two great works of our time, both by non-believers, demonstrate this. They are Pasolini's film, *The Gospel According to St. Matthew* (1964), and a novel by the Portuguese novelist José Saramago, *The Gospel According to Jesus Christ* (1991). Both works embarrass Mailer's earnest fraudulence. Both present a Jesus who resembles, at first sight, Mailer's, or Renan's: tetchy, confused at times, a fallible gatherer of men, a revolutionary. Both artists are unafraid of the supernatural: their Jesus speaks with God, is visited by angels, walks on the water. Yet both artists wrestle with the biblical texts they have inherited, seeing them almost as a devilish challenge to artistic originality.

It is because their stories already exist as stories that these artists sink themselves so heavily in the real. The real is their great modern advantage as artists, over their inheritance. "Belief" may be surrendered, but the real must be guarded. Pasolini, using Calabrian peasants and non-actors, lets the camera browse beautifully over the faces of poor men and women. He makes the camera explore a physiognomic skepticism: an innocent sarcasm stares from these peasants' faces as Jesus preaches to them. Animals snuffle in the mud. There are children everywhere, shouting and begging. Jesus moves in a cloud of urchins. There is dirt and noise. At one moment, Jesus strides past a group of men working in the fields. As he passes them, he tells them to repent, for the kingdom of God is at hand. They turn and look at him as if he is a madman. The camera slows. The deep irrelevance of Jesus to their lives is made manifest. And while they look suspicious, their faces also have a kind of sanctity, for they cannot be touched. Mailer's entire novel is not worth that one scene.

Saramago does not mimic the gospel stories like Mailer, he bounces off them. He *novelizes*. Mary is a poor wife, Joseph is a mediocre carpenter. (Mailer makes Joseph a sage of carpentry.) While Matthew tells us that Joseph sees in a dream that he and his family must escape Herod and flee to Egypt, Saramago has Joseph overhear two of Herod's soldiers talking about the dread orders that they have just received, and must soon obey. Terrified, he runs home. Unlike Mailer, who accepts the biblical absence, Saramago makes Joseph a real father to Jesus.

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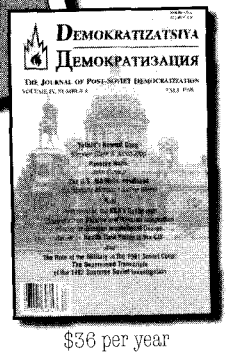

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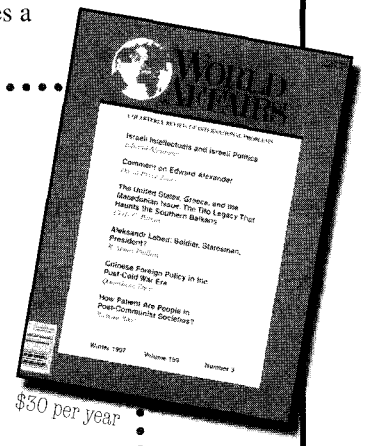

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Saramago's Joseph is captured by mistake, rather as Pierre is captured in *War and Peace*, and crucified by the Romans as a rebel. When Jesus, who is only a little boy, hears of his father's death, he cries out: "Father, Father, why have you forsaken me?" The irony is not forced, and it humanizes the later identical lament, enriches it. Jesus becomes Mary Magdalene's lover. The two are inseparable, and she is one of the few who truly believes in him. When Jesus is on the verge of raising Lazarus from the dead, Mary Magdalene stops him, saying, "No one has committed so much sin in his life that he deserves to die twice."

It is in such swerves, such disobedience, that a great novelist refreshes himself. The gorgeous paradox of Pasolini's film and Saramago's novel is the paradox of the incarnation made animate: the more real Jesus becomes, the more divinely he shines. The more skeptical these works of art, the more reverence is in their skepticism. The more reverent they are, the more it is a reverence for the real. Mailer cannot show us a real Jesus, and so he cannot tempt us with the expensive lure of the incarnation. Besides, would Mailer, once so talented at scouring the actual, even recognize the greatness of these two versions of the gospels? Each new book by him is worse than the last: he has become a bibliographer's definition of nostalgia. He remembers that one must be daring as an artist, but he has forgotten to what end. His Jesus blusters, in Mailer fashion, about the importance of boldness, and despises "the timid heart." But a timid heart might have flinched, properly, at sounding this worthless echo. •

Keeping Us In Hysterics

BY FREDERICK CREWS

Hystories: Hysterical Epidemics and Modern Media by Elaine Showalter

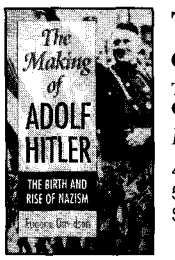
(Columbia University Press, 244 pp., $24.95)

For over a decade now, the object of keenest interest within American interdisciplinary scholarship has been a disease, and a possibly nonexistent one. As Elaine Showalter, Avalon Foundation Professor of the Humanities at Princeton University, puts it near the outset of her own latest contribution to the field:

> While physicians and psychiatrists have long been writing obituaries for hysteria, scholars in the humanities and social sciences have given it new life. Social historians, philosophers, anthropologists, literary critics, and art historians have taken up the subject of hysteria because it cuts across historical periods and national boundaries, poses fundamental questions about gender and culture, and offers insights into language, narrative, and representation.

This statement is certainly right about the disillusionment of the medical authorities. By now it is reasonably clear that hysteria, which was once thought to cause nervous women and some men to experience paralyses, seizures, tics, linguistic impediments and hallucinations, is not a stable disorder with characteristics that occur independently of social expectations. As a relatively fixed cluster of symptoms, it evaporated after the Victorian heyday of its chief theoreticians, Jean-Martin Charcot, Pierre Janet, Josef Breuer and the early Sigmund Freud—a likely sign that the syndrome was not only psychogenic but artifactual, coaxed into approved forms largely by the therapeutic interventions that were meant to cure it. Hysteria was probably an umbrella term that described a diverse phenomenon; it included symptoms of organic disorders, some outright malingering, and psychogenic suffering of a kind that suited the temper of the age.

Strictly speaking, of course, an ailment cannot "pose questions about gender and culture" and "offer insights into language, narrative, and representation." That is the work of the academics, who would have graced us with their thoughts on those matters with or without hysteria as a pretext. But their enthusiasm for this particular syndrome is understandable. In the nineteenth century, hysteria served as a magnet for masculinist and racialist notions that are now often assumed to have occupied the inmost layer of the smug Victorian mind. Indeed, one common way of regarding the disease, amply developed in Showalter's influential study *The Female Malady: Women, Madness, and English Culture, 1830-1980*, which ap-



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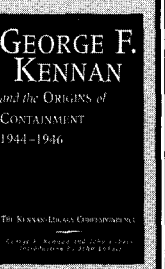

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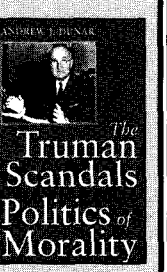

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peared in 1985, is to say that its diagnosis and its treatment were a medicalization of misogyny itself.

As we recently learned from *Approaching Hysteria*, Marc Micale's comprehensive survey of hysteria studies, that idea of Showalter's has been variously assessed as fertile and regrettably one-dimensional. But Showalter herself is sure that she occupies the cutting edge of research in this field. She, Micale and a few others, she declares in *Hystories*, constitute "the New Hysterians," who understand that hysteria has always been "a body language for people who otherwise might not be able to speak or even to admit what they feel." And her group is in touch with findings in all of the disciplines that matter. The New Hysterians have established themselves, she proudly reports, "at the busy crossroad [sic] where psychoanalytic theory, narratology, feminist criticism, and the history of medicine intersect. . . ."

In the academy as it is currently constituted, that methodological lineup appears thoroughly unproblematic. Showalter sees nothing here requiring further explanation. Yet it may not be immediately obvious to an outsider why two fields of study, medical history and the structure of narrative, are being matched with two vortexes of controversy, psychoanalysis and feminism. Is this intellectual-ideological hybrid really the best available equipment for making sense of hysteria? And don't rival allegiances within the contentious Freudian and feminist traditions dictate very different apprehensions of the social past?

This latter point is especially pertinent to "hysterical" women, whom Freud either cured or persecuted, depending on one's perspective. If, like Showalter, one is inclined to settle for "equity feminism" as opposed to the "gender feminism" that feeds on rage against men, one will be sympathetic to misdiagnosed "hysterics" but wary of glamorizing their helplessness and histrionics. And that tendency will be reinforced if, again like Showalter, one feels more comfortable with classical Freudian notions than with the radical view (common among gender feminists) that psychoanalysis needs to be purged of its oppressive patriarchal features. Showalter's theoretical affinities, never cogently defended, thus press her continually toward a middle-of-the-road outlook that could pass for sheer reasonableness. But it is, I am afraid, more a matter of dodging trouble and taking refuge in received ideas.

Until now, the clearest instance of this weakness has been Showalter's inability to be consistent about whether she regards hysteria as an authentic malady. She has supported both sides without appearing to notice that she is contradicting herself. Her usual view is that hysteria was less an affliction than a somatic idiom for otherwise silenced people—an attractive hypothesis that is somewhat incommoded by the managerial style of such wealthy and manipulative hysterics as Breuer's "Anna O." (Bertha Pappenheim) and Freud's "Frau Cäcilie M." (Anna von Lieben). Yet in *The Female Malady* Showalter also upheld Charcot's opposite judgment—it was briefly influential but fiercely contested—that hysteria was a true disease whose manifestations were visited upon, not suggested to or invented by, the sufferer. "Through careful observation, physical examination, and the use of hypnosis," she wrote, "Charcot was able to prove that hysterical symptoms, while produced by emotions rather than by physical injury, were genuine, and not under the conscious control of the patient."

That last claim was already out of step with informed opinion when it appeared in 1985. To be sure, Charcot did regard hypnosis as crucial to an understanding of hysteria, whose symptoms, he believed, were produced when a trauma sent the organism into a quasi-hypnotic state. By "rehypnotizing" his resident hysterics and putting them through their symptomatic paces, supposedly without their conscious awareness of obeying an instruction, Charcot imagined that he was demonstrating the integrity of hysteria and its isolation from conscious will. But in truth he had proved little more than his own gullibility. His critics and later students were able to show that coaching and suggestibility, not to mention dissimulation, amply account for all of Charcot's hypnotic results.

Why does this matter? The point is, in fact, momentous. For the young Freud sat reverently at Charcot's feet in 1885-86, enthralled by what he would eventually regard as hypnotic evidence of "split consciousness." It was on that basis that he would begin his fateful quest for unconscious mental causes of neuroses. In 1888, in the preface to his translation of Hippolyte Bernheim's book *Suggestion*, he explicitly rejected the idea that Charcot could have obtained his findings through suggestion, since otherwise "[w]e should not learn from the study of major hypnotism what alterations in excitability succeed one another in the nervous system of hysterical patients . . . ; we should merely learn what intentions Charcot suggested (in a manner of which he himself was unconscious) to the subjects of his experiments—a thing entirely

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irrelevant to our understanding alike of hypnosis and of hysteria." Here is Freud as Quixote, taking the measure of his first windmill.

The more clearly we realize that Showalter in 1985 was quite justified in regarding hysteria as jointly "constructed" by doctors and patients, the more ludicrous it seems that Freud could have dismissed the threat of suggestion not just in Charcot's case but throughout his own career. The joke, however, was lost on Showalter, who has always displayed a novitiate's piety toward the founding legend of psychoanalysis. Like Breuer, whose Anna O. case she badly misrepresented in *The Female Malady*, Charcot is an indispensable "precursor" in that legend, and Showalter was therefore unable to adopt a sufficiently critical view of his mistakes.

In *Hystories*, Showalter finally takes a harder line toward Charcot and hysteria. But now she is able to keep the hysterical ball in play by deliberately blurring the line between hysteria as a mental illness of individuals and the popular notion of "mass hysteria," or waves of fear, morbidity, and physical unease that ripple through collectivities in the grip of shared delusions. Her central claim is that hysteria recurs in more or less regular cycles—and that we today, like the Victorians, are living through a peak phase of the phenomenon. The chief hysterias of our time, for Showalter, are chronic fatigue syndrome, Gulf War syndrome, recovered memory of childhood sexual abuse, multiple personality disorder, satanic ritual abuse and alien abduction, all of them resulting from a contagion of erroneous ideas.

Showalter does a creditable journalistic job of marshaling informed opinion about each of her six American "hysterias." Even so, misgivings arise from the outset. For one thing, she builds no conceptual bridge from individual pathology to the social dynamics of rumor-formation. Is it hysterical to pick up a faddish idea about UFOs, or about one's feeling of listlessness? Do we gain anything by labeling as hysterical the serene self-cancelers of Heaven's Gate? The desired linkage of such instances with hysteria à la Charcot, Janet, Breuer and Freud is little more than semantic. And even within her modern instances, Showalter has yoked together vastly disparate phenomena. She sees no significant difference, for her analysis, between mistaken, correctable beliefs on the part of normal people and paranoid phantasms and lasting physical debility. She is even willing to count as hysterical the panic of Japanese subway riders in the wake of a poison gas attack, as if there were no

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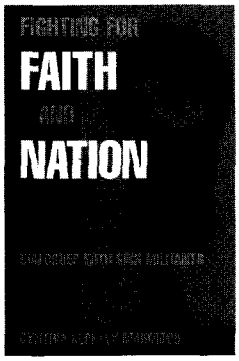

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distinction to be drawn between well-founded fear and pure delusion.

There is something peremptory about Showalter's list of recent hysterias. She has married two items on which the medical jury is still out—chronic fatigue syndrome and Gulf War syndrome—to four others whose iatrogenic (doctor-induced) and hallucinatory basis is by now evident to most observers. Malingerers and copycats are always with us, but it seems especially early, while investigations into possible toxic exposure are still underway, for Showalter to be asserting so categorically that Gulf War syndrome "does not exist."

By casting the hysterical net as widely as possible, Showalter is apparently seeking to gain certain tactical advantages. She wants us to believe, for example, that our hysteria-plagued society urgently needs the ministrations of literary critics, without whom the "story" of hysteria would be indecipherable or vulnerable to ingenuous literal interpretation. We must turn to fiction, she maintains, if we are to fortify ourselves against present and future hysterical outbreaks, for novels "can tell us a lot more about the causes and cures of hysteria than most of the self-help books on the market." And it is critics, naturally, with their keen attunement to genre conventions, who can save us from the fallacy of thinking that similarities among "hystories" (reports of abduction, etc.) are a warrant of their truth.

Showalter is right to emphasize that popular narratives in our time have transmitted destructive misapprehensions about the mind. Think of *Sybil, Michelle Remembers* and *The Three Faces of Eve*, which have variously primed Americans to believe in satanism, multiple personality, and repressed memories of sexual abuse. Understanding the conventions and the structure of those books, however, is of negligible utility. What we chiefly need to know about them is that their stories are false. These texts call not for formal analysis, but for research into their suspect origins. A literary critic could conduct such research as well as the next person, but Showalter has not even perceived its value, so bent is she upon commentary of a more usual but irrelevant kind.

On its face, *Hystories* seems to be saying that we Americans are living through one of the most perilous junctures of our history. Showalter points out that we are approaching the year 2000, a perfect witching hour for mass hysteria. Millennial panic is drawing us inexorably toward an Armageddon in which "traumatists and ufologists, experiencers and abductees, survivors and survivalists" will all join forces against public sanity. This "coming hysterical plague" may yet be averted, but only if we mobilize all our resources of prevention. As a sample of such preparedness, Showalter walks us through the hysterical and paranoid themes of *Batman Forever*, one of many cultural products that are allegedly laying the groundwork for a new Salem on a nationwide scale.

The reader who finds all this hard to swallow needn't feel apologetic. Showalter doesn't really believe it herself. On the penultimate page of her book, she admits that

> [t]he hysterical witch-hunts of our own time may be waning.... People accused of abuse on the basis of recovered memory are being acquitted. Convictions have been overturned. Retractors are taking back their accusations of satanic ritual or childhood abuse. Journalists in Britain and the United States have taken up the cause of those falsely accused. Books and TV documentaries have helped turn the tide of credibility....

Thus Showalter's own attempt to whip up a little hysteria, if only to lend urgency to her discourse, eventually comes to naught.

Watching Showalter's argument self-destruct, one has to wonder whether she doesn't have some other end in view. There are grounds for inferring that *Hystories* was conceived in mindfulness not of millennial frenzy but of something quite opposite: the turning of the tide against recovered memory, acknowledged here as a seeming afterthought. Showalter has perceived that the therapeutic craze of the late 1980s and early 1990s, whereby patients have been encouraged to concoct images of early sexual violation and then to suppose that those images must be memories, is rapidly becoming a liability, both intellectually and ethically. Sensing the movement's imminent collapse, Showalter wants to assure us that she never meant to endorse it.

I single out recovered memory as the core "hysteria" in Showalter's list for two reasons. The first is that recovered memory is the common denominator of all four of her syndromes that involve delusions and not just physical symptoms. Belatedly "recalled" childhood sexual abuse, multiple personality, satanic ritual abuse and interplanetary abduction all tend to blossom on the same branch, namely, suggestive prompting by therapists who use hypnosis and / or related techniques to bring the client's perceived history into alignment with a favorite diagnosis. Indeed, the "memory" of satanic rites and the emergence of "dissociated

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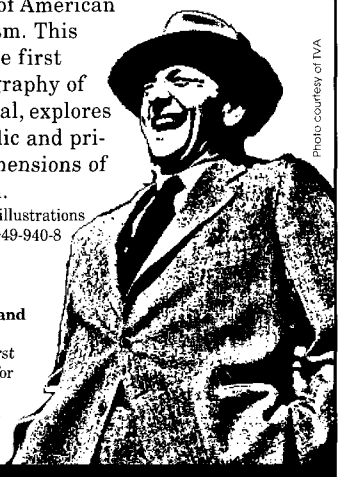

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alters" are simply later stages of the search for more and more grisly instances of sexual abuse. And it is only in therapy, typically, that the lost souls who suspect that they may have been wafted into hovering spaceships succeed in "remembering" for certain that it was so.

Second, Showalter tells us, in a commendable act of self-criticism, that she must now reconsider her declaration at the end of *The Female Malady* that "the best hope for the future is the feminist therapy movement," including "women's self-help groups." She now recognizes that just such groups, at the very time that she was exalting them, were crucially responsible for launching the recovered memory movement; and she sees that even today they remain a breeding ground of false sexual accusations. *Hystories* is Showalter's vehicle not only for correcting her mistake, but also for challenging the whole conception of "women's ways of knowing"—a conception that, for many radical feminists and distraught women under their influence, has turned the suspicion of early sexual violation into a foregone conclusion.

This is a worthwhile purpose on Showalter's part, but it immediately comes up against a delicate point of diplomacy. Just how much recantation can she afford without jeopardizing her stature within the fiercely politicized field of women's studies? Feminists, she asserts, owe a primary obligation to the truth. Yet she also knows that the very concept of truth has taken a pummeling from some of her sisters as an oppressive phallocentric ideal. Showalter is not about to walk the plank on behalf of truth-for-its-own-sake. Instead, she adopts a politic stance of more feminist than thou. Feminism itself, she points out, possesses its own "strong enlightenment, rationalist tradition," and so she will "ask feminist questions" about the conspiratorial illusions of our time. And with less fanfare, she will backpedal and equivocate whenever her challenge to radical feminism threatens to become a permanent estrangement.

Note, for example, how Showalter professes to be scandalized that Lynne Cheney

> draws a sinister analogy between women's studies discussions and therapeutic coercion: "Indeed, there are many parallels between the recovered memory movement and feminism as it has come to be practiced on campuses. The encouragement—even the requirement—in feminist classrooms to confess personal views and traumas establishes an environment very much like the one that exists in victim recovery groups." Feminist activists are understandably angry about these attacks....

Now, Showalter knows perfectly well that the "recovery group" approach to pedagogy is practiced and openly advocated by some feminist academics, and she also knows that many women students, with little or no assistance from therapists, have disastrously acquired "memories" of sexual abuse when their seminar leaders and classmates effectively demanded that they do so. For Showalter to make that charge, however, would be a virtual declaration of academic civil war. Instead, she rounds up the usual suspect, the impenitently conservative Cheney, and offers her as a hostage to the militants.

Showalter's distaste for factional strife may also account for the emphasis that she now places on male hysteria. As she uneasily remarks, hysteria is "a term that particularly enrages some feminists because for centuries it has been used to ridicule and trivialize women's medical and political complaints." But if the recovered memory movement is hysterical, and Showalter insists that it is, then she herself is bestowing the h-word on the feminist mainstays of that movement. Only by stipulating that men, too, fall victim to hysteria—including "our war veterans" who "had to deal with frightening gossip" in the Persian Gulf—can Showalter acquire some insurance against the accusation of having betrayed her sex.

Once that insurance has been purchased, Showalter feels confident enough to dissent not only from recovered memory theory but also from a peculiarly defeatist, victim-minded style of feminist thought that fed into it. This is the 1970s modified-Lacanian doctrine of Hélène Cixous, Julia Kristeva, Catherine Clément and Luce Irigaray, according to which the whole realm of rational knowledge was ceded to men while "absence" and "lack" were celebrated as innately feminine. Those voluble champions of muteness elevated the hysterical woman of the nineteenth century to heroic status. They proclaimed that "the discourse of the hysteric" was the true speech of womankind, to be cherished in defiance of such patriarchal straitjackets as grammar and syntax. Not so, objects Showalter, joining what has by now become a chorus of protest against "essentialist" stereotyping of the incoherent female mind.

Again, however, the thinness of Showalter's critique becomes painfully apparent. In her view, it was only a lapse of prudence for Parisian feminists to chant, in 1972, "*Nous sommes toutes des hystériques!*" In doing so, "they came dangerously close to acting like hysterical divas," and those among them who were psycho-

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analysts accordingly found themselves penalized by their Freudian or Lacanian establishments. For Showalter, playing Dear Abby for the moment, the lesson is clear: "Claiming hysteria is not the wisest strategy for professional success." But what about the Freudian/Lacanian premises of French feminism? Shouldn't they be reviewed and judged?

If Showalter were to undertake such an inquiry, however, it could lead to awkward questions about her own unexamined psychoanalytic assumptions. Discretion is therefore preferable. Thus, when she relates that Cixous and company located the origin of hysterical female discourse in "the pre-Oedipal phase of feminine development, when the baby daughter takes the mother as her primary object of desire," Showalter observes only that the idea possessed "tremendous intellectual and emotional appeal." Evidently, her professed allegiance to Enlightenment standards does not extend to a concern for the empirical basis of theories about the mind.

Here we return to a source of confusion in Showalter's work that is even more consequential than her bending to every feminist breeze. I mean her unreflective loyalty to the broad outlines of the psychoanalytic revelation. That loyalty appears to be tested at various moments in her book, partly in response to cited objections that I myself have posed. But the Freudian unconscious remains Showalter's master key not just to psychological sophistication, but to the alleviation of mental woe everywhere. As she puts it, "Freud's message never got through to millions of people, who still distrust and fear the unconscious and its power over us. As a result, they suffer needlessly."

I would like to say that Showalter and I disagree about psychoanalysis and leave it at that, but something more symptomatic of "humanistic" complacency is on display here: a bland refusal to think consecutively. Remarkably, Showalter concedes the truth of nearly every negative observation about Freud and psychoanalysis that comes to her notice. Yet those concessions leave her argument completely unaffected, as if she were just going through the motions of acknowledging a distant, boring debate. Her faith in Freud has about it a dreaminess that cannot be penetrated by mundane considerations of evidence and logic.

Showalter grants that Freud was a self-publicizing "showman" who was less interested in curing his patients than in turning them into exhibits of his pet notions. More significantly, he was a "stubborn, bullying interrogator" who "pressured his patients to produce narratives congruent with his theories." And she further admits that, when Freud adopted his Oedipal explanation of the psychoneuroses, his system of thought became (in Richard Webster's quoted words) "almost completely freed from the constraints of empirical reality." Does it not follow that we should hesitate to adopt that system as our own lens upon reality? But the issue is never raised.

In this respect Showalter proves to be typical of her fellow New Hysterians, who are uniformly partial to psychoanalysis though often stern toward its creator. Take Sander L. Gilman, an eminent cultural historian and a recent president of the Modern Language Association, whose blurb for *Hystories* calls it "the standard for all future studies of mental illness and culture." In learned and provocative books such as *Freud, Race, and Gender* and *The Case of Sigmund Freud*, Gilman goes further than any accused Freud-basher toward reducing psychoanalysis to a manifestation of one madcap improviser's eccentricity. In Gilman's account, Freud's universal castration complex was his attempt to pin on the human race what Germanic anti-Semites were saying about the circumcised Jews; and again, his psychology of women is presented as yet another deflection of racist slanders. These charges saddle Freud with a craven furtiveness that sits ill with

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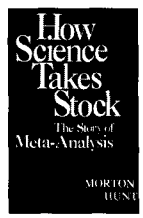

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the Promethean legend he took such pains to promote. Yet Gilman's startling indictment never causes him to reconsider his own Freudianism. Some commitments, I suppose, are just too deep for thought.

Showalter herself is far more protective of Freud the man. Indeed, when she has to decide which movements to approve and which to shun, she applies a simple litmus test: Do these people show sufficient respect for the discoverer of the unconscious? Thus the French feminists, despite their "appealing" manipulation of Freudian developmental notions, placed themselves beyond the reach of her forgiveness when they depicted Freud as the male oppressor par excellence and characterized his female patients as martyrs to a sexist institutional practice.

Preeminent among those rehabilitated "stars" and "supermodels," as Showalter scornfully calls them, stands the teenage "Dora" (Ida Bauer), whose brief treatment at Freud's hands ended rancorously when she refused to accede to his view of her as an Oedipally fixated bisexual whose symptoms had been prompted not by her gruesome family predicament, but by early masturbation and a desire to suck her father's penis. Showalter is uncomfortable with that diagnosis, but her outrage is reserved for those feminists who have called Freud, not Dora, the real hysteric in the case. "They made Freud the fall guy, pinning the blame for Dora's symptoms onto him...." And again: "Dramatizing the psychoanalyst's hysteria, reducing his theories to performance or farce, is another way of fending off the specter of the unconscious." It is time, decrees Showalter, to forsake the perverse outlook that prizes "women's stories" over "doctors' studies," the latter presumably being trustworthy because doctors know best, especially if their name is Freud.

Yet the doctor in Dora's case was not just wrong, he was also relentlessly cruel, and his cruelty was fed by the theory of mental conflict that Showalter sentimentally misconstrues. Freud's harrying of Dora rested on his Charcot-inspired conviction that hysteria was as regular in its laws of operation as epilepsy or syphilis, and on his utterly mechanical view of its causation. That is why he could write to Wilhelm Fliess, soon after beginning his attempt to break Dora's will, that the case had "smoothly opened to the existing collection of picklocks." Freud was sure that he could force to the surface an admission of a specific early practice, event, or fantasy (masturbation, the primal scene, an incest-wish) to match each symptom. The contrast with Showalter's empathetic, socially aware, symptom-as-protest conception of hysteria could hardly be greater—but she draws no conclusion from that fact.

On the crucial topic of recovered memory, finally, Showalter's psychoanalytic partisanship once again requires her to don blinders and give out useless advice. She is eager to believe that the alleged link between Freudianism and recovered memory is merely a defamation by "one-sided" and "vitriolic" extremists such as myself. As she mentions in passing, however, therapeutic epidemics can only get going if they possess a theoretical superstructure. And though Showalter won't come near to admitting it, nothing could be more obvious than that the theory behind recovered memory was drawn almost entirely from the Freudian picture of the mind.

It was Freud who gave us the idea of repression, and of the vivid, accurate retrieval of derepressed material after a lapse of decades. It was Freud who arbitrarily singled out sexual trauma as uniquely pathogenic and refused to allow for normal infantile amnesia, instead invoking the repression of sexual vicissitudes. And it was Freud who taught us that symptoms are really disguised memories, that the interpretation of dreams can lead to accurate knowledge of the distant past, that permanent psychological relief can come only from revisiting that past, and that a patient's agitated behavior during therapy can be safely

Success

Peter was desperate. He hadn't had sex
since the separation and every woman he knew looked
good to him: Louise, the animal activist; Martha,
the musicologist; Miriam, buxom and capable,
once named likeliest to have the biggest family.
Even Lavender, ugly, strange as she was talking
of alien abduction, tantric episodes with the gods,
seemed mysterious and compelling. But each
was married, or engaged, or gay. He jacked off
in his laundry, scanned the personals. He'd left his first wife,
a nervous woman who never stopped cleaning,
vacuumed the carpets constantly, yelled if his shoes
weren't off at the doorstep. "How do you expect me
to keep this place clean?" she'd ask sharply.
Then she'd weep. It made him crazy.
"I wanted a wife, a family," he told his buddy Nick,
"not the maid from hell." So he moved out,
found an apartment across town, stacked
dirty dishes everywhere for weeks at a time,
and felt happy, ecstatic really, for a while,
but now, thinking of his wife, her slender body leaning
into the closet to put away his coat, her face flushed
as she pushed the vacuum over clean carpet, made him
horny and forgiving. "Maybe I was insensitive," he thought.
He decided one night to dial the old number
"Hello?" her voice brought tears to his eyes.
"Honey, I want you back," he blurted, "I miss you."
"Come home." (That sweet sense of clarity.)
He couldn't say all he felt: "I'll be there
in twenty minutes ... I, I love you." Toothbrush,
clean underwear, quick glance in the mirror.
At the house, he buried his face in her chest.
"I'm sorry, so sorry." They had sex all night long.
"What was I thinking to leave this good thing?"
he mused, lying beside his dozing wife. "How perfect
she is, how sweet. Maybe we'll have a child."
He drifted off, dreamed of getting promoted
at work, a big party with lots of presents,
people slapping him on the back, saying,
"Big guy, I always knew you could do it."

Beth Gylys

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ascribed to torment by the repressed. Where would recovered memory therapy be without all those unsubstantiated tenets?

For Showalter, predictably, the key to halting outbreaks such as the recovered memory madness is to "defend Freud's insights and try to restore confidence in serious psychotherapy," mainly psychoanalysis. But psychoanalysis evolved from a recovered memory inquisition—Freud's "seduction theory" of the mid-1890s—and it contains a built-in potential to revert to that state. When disheartened analysts, sensing public resistance, tire of ascribing murderous and incestuous designs to small children and of telling real victims of early molestation that they are suffering only from illusory "screen memories," the hunt for Oedipal fantasies can get swiftly replaced by a hunt for repressed sexual abuse and its "perpetrators."

Just such a turn was taken around 1930, when Freud's anguished disciple Sándor Ferenczi, chafing against the master's icy and controlling ways, decided that his women patients deserved sympathy as probable survivors of early molestation. And, since about 1990, it has been happening again. As C. Brooks Brenneis documents in a new book, *Recovered Memories of Trauma: Transferring the Present to the Past* (International Universities Press), considerable numbers of certified analysts, many of them radical feminists, have themselves been adapting psychoanalytic technique to recovered memory practice.

When Showalter at last awakens to this appalling phenomenon, she will doubtless say that the analysts in question have not chosen the best style of feminism or Freudianism and are behaving badly—in fact, just like a pack of hysterics. A more effective response might be to call into question the whole unproven idea that colloquy between a therapist and a patient can reliably unlock repressed secrets from the patient's early childhood. And to that end, a truly skeptical history of "dynamic" psychotherapy and its favorite diseases might be an important source of illumination. Unfortunately, it isn't likely to be forthcoming from any of Showalter's New Hysterians.

FREDERICK CREWS is preparing an anthology of critical studies of Freud, to be published in 1998 by Viking Penguin.

A Brief Shining Moment

BY CHRISTINE STANSELL

Gender and Jim Crow: Women and the Politics of White Supremacy in North Carolina, 1896-1920 by Glenda Elizabeth Gilmore

(University of North Carolina Press, 384 pp., $49.95)

The period from the Supreme Court decision in *Plessy* v. *Ferguson* of 1896, which upheld the legality of racial segregation, to the bloody summer of 1919, when murderous riots against blacks shook the country, is generally seen as the nadir of African American history. The abolitionist leaders who had pressed the claims of blacks through the Civil War and Reconstruction were gone. Frederick Douglass had died in 1895, deeply disheartened about the prospects for biracial democracy. The 1890s saw the mass disenfranchisement of black men in even those states of the former Confederacy that had escaped the reactionary resurgence following Reconstruction. Lynchings were on the rise. Booker T. Washington, the avatar of conciliation and caution, the advocate of the advantages accruing to blacks who knew their place, was the man of the hour. Other leaders, to be sure, kept things stirring: the bold Ida Barnett-Wells initiated what was, at the outset, a one-woman campaign against lynching; W.E.B. Du Bois organized the NAACP and began to set in place the networks of legal advocacy which would push the civil rights fight ahead through the dark years. Still, compared to what went before and what came later—the astonishing activity of the freedpeople in Reconstruction, the extraordinary mobilization of the civil rights movement—African American politics seem to have retreated behind the wall of segregation.

The history of this low moment may

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even seem like an allegory for our own time. It resonates, certainly, with our own distress: an immiserated and disenfranchised African American poor; indifferent white liberals who oscillated between pity and contempt; a downtrodden and politically impotent black middle class; a vicious economic structure of white supremacy that made politics its handmaiden. But this allegorical temptation must be resisted. There are significant differences between then and now. Civil rights are now the law of the land, and a large black middle class has arisen, and African American voices are heard and honored. And another of those differences concerns the true and complicated nature of that nadir, which is where *Gender and Jim Crow*, an exquisitely written and conceived book about turn-of-the-century North Carolina, comes in.

Glenda Elizabeth Gilmore sets in motion a different cast of characters and a new story of the nadir, one that is oddly hopeful. She does so simply, and with a bold historical stroke: she broadens her investigation of a supposedly emasculated middle-class political leadership to include both sexes. Gilmore finds that when the advent of Jim Crow drove black men out of politics, women remained behind, scarcely noticed, to become unobtrusive but efficacious advocates for the "race," and exemplars of a tenuous but promising interracialism. Gilmore replaces the allegory of the nadir, with its stereotypes of a timid black middle class cowed by white power, with a more richly researched and imagined story about women who, at the far edges of politics, reworked a civic culture that came to serve as a nursery for mass resistance to segregation.

One mark of a good historian is the capacity to surprise, and Gilmore confounds our expectations from the outset by casting Jim Crow not as the logical culmination of the benighted situation of black people in the post-Reconstruction era—the popular view of the subject—but as a catastrophic occurrence in a potent field of democratic progress in the late 1880s and early 1890s. These were years when the "new men" of the Upper South, averse in their own way to the old white patricians, made their accommodations with black voters in the Republican Party. The party was not racially egalitarian, to be sure. And yet it honored in the abstract—and sometimes in practice—the precepts of civil rights: it calculated its choices in terms of a biracial electorate; it produced tentative interracial alliances; and it resulted in numerous appointments of blacks as local and party officials.

Party politics were men's business, since women could not vote. But the connection of black women to politics was nonetheless powerful. Gilmore argues that the faith in the collective struggle for the race was bred in the bones of these daughters of ex-slaves, women who were toddlers during the battles of Reconstruction. They were raised to expect full civil rights: a generational experience, as Gilmore notes arrestingly, that would not be repeated for Southern black people until after the Voting Rights Act of 1964. As the girls of Reconstruction came of age in a flourishing middle-class black world in the 1890s, they sought to improve the standing of African Americans in ways that were different from, but complementary to, the political work of enfranchised Republican men.

Courtesy Corine Pettey, New York

SARAH DUDLEY PETTEY AND HER CHILDREN, NORTH CAROLINA, C. 1900

Theirs was a distinctly female civic enterprise, shot through with a conviction of sexual equality. "Usefulness" was the reigning ethos, understood as the obligation and the opportunity to help other black people. This calling was not a woman's duty to family; it was a public endeavor shared by the sexes. "Usefulness" required an education equal to men's, and meaningful work in the world. By 1892, Gilmore writes, most Southerners knew "some young woman from their own neighborhood, once a barefoot girl, perhaps the daughter of a freedwoman who could not read or write, who shone in the local school and then, through ingenuity, gumption, and luck, left home to pursue higher education."

Proud parents scraped together the money to send their talented daughters along with their sons to the serious black seminaries and colleges that cropped up in the state after Reconstruction, usually with the financial aid of Northern philanthropists. The ethos of Southern black education—though not of Southern white education—encouraged the mixing of the sexes. Single-sex institutions were not only impractical, when funding for black institutions was so scarce; they were also antithetical to the experience of mass education after the Civil War, when children, mothers, and fathers all learned to read in the same classrooms. At the seminaries, young women studied Latin and Greek (the great pedagogical prize, since classical language study had been a strictly male privilege before the Civil War), mathematics, science, history, and literature along with the men.

Marriage represented a continuation of the social mission of these young women, a relationship of "civil enterprise" or "industrious partnership" rather than a relegation to the parlor and the nursery. Returning after graduation to small North Carolina towns and cities, seminary women married ministers, doctors, and lawyers, and took up a place as stalwart matrons—church leaders, schoolteachers, helpers of the poor—in a proud, hard-working, socially conscious class. Since the racialist thought that was fast gaining currency in the 1890s pinned black poverty on the domestic "degeneracy" of the race, the creation of a

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proper home and well-turned-out children in themselves took on a charged importance. Successful young black couples lived deliberately conspicuous lives, sporting high fashion, driving around in fine carriages, and serving elaborate meals at sumptuously set tables.

Still, the elegant home was a by-product, not a focal point, of women's work. The real stakes of the civic partnership had to do with women's involvement in politics, in collective action conceived as so central to African American life that one minister could state "all we have and are, came through politics." And it was in the temperance movement, which took the impulse of moral uplift into the working-class home, that they replicated the interracialism of Republican men by joining a mass crusade against drink which also preoccupied tens of thousands of white women, North and South.

Temperance was in many ways a conservative political choice in tune with the most conventional ideas of middle-class women's superior morality and the degraded morals of the poor (black and white). As Gilmore shows, black women challenged Southern codes when they pushed their way into the crusade against drink. Late nineteenth-century Southern society provided only one template for an interracial relationship between women: the white female employer and her black cook or maid. There were few ways available to imagine a different kind of colloquy across the color line. But temperance work, its Victorian look notwithstanding, provided a narrow path into some kind of modernity. In working for the tremendously popular Women's Christian Temperance Union (WCTU), black women saw, for the first time, a chance to create a community of Christian women who looked past skin color to acknowledge a common humanity, a model of interracial cooperation that might expand and encourage more shared labors in the future.

Some of Gilmore's most interesting writing is about these interracial efforts. In women's history today, a reaction has set in against an older tendency to romanticize black and white women's kinship and commonalities. As in other kinds of American history, the imperatives of identity politics are seeping into scholarship, to preclude any strong interest in transactions across the color line that have a tinge of reciprocity and integration. There is a black women's history and a white women's history and the two rarely meet, except when the subject is the dismal swamp of race hatred.

Gilmore is no sentimentalist: the WCTU and other uplift and civic associations in which white and black women labored together were no sweet domain of sorority. The temperance movement involved the same regimen of continual slights, insults, and outright prejudice that black men faced in the Republican Party. While black women saw themselves as equal partners, white women saw them as their younger sisters, to be instructed and uplifted. Like much interracial work that followed, the proceedings depended upon black women's equanimity and patience in the face of the condescension and the smug theatrics of race tolerance that white women dished out.

But neither is Gilmore a muckraker of race relations. In an important passage, she reflects upon what it means to treat racism as a historical relationship rather than a metaphor of evil. In the process, she breaks the hold of the allegory of white racism and black victimization. Nothing about interracial cooperation implied for black women "a common commitment to civil rights, to racial equality, to working together cheerfully, or even to working together with civility;" there was never a point when white temperance workers did not act with racist motivations and assumptions. Still, to label the experiment "racist" and leave it at that obscures a more important truth. As Gilmore wisely writes, "racism is never a static phenomenon. It

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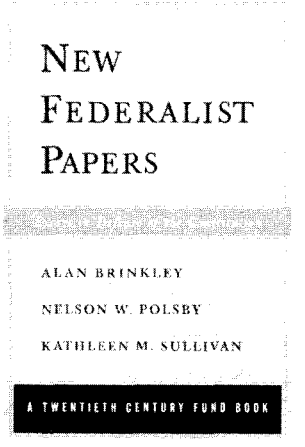

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waxes and wanes in response to a larger social context, sometimes perniciously defining the contours of daily life, sometimes receding as behavior and speech challenge the boundaries of racial constructs."

An imperfect and half-baked interracial liberalism still brought change beyond the articulated purpose of banning demon rum. The shared project of sobering up the state of North Carolina implicitly challenged the racial conventions of the time, opening up the possibility of conceiving political relations between black and white women in a new way. Despite the *revanche* against black citizenship in the Lower South, and the equivocation of the Republican Party on issues of full participation, and an abiding racism that was thickened by social Darwinism, there was much movement in North Carolina back and forth across the color line in the 1890s.

Women, white and black, met together to discuss the effects of drunkenness on the poor. Men, white and black, caucused to deal out post office appointments. Interracial couples in the Upper South lived with some assurance of being free from violent harassment. White people and black people might throng the same church, separated by the center aisle, to hear a famous revival preacher, mingle in the same tent to see a two-headed girl come to town with the circus. There were skirmishes of parasol-pokings as African American ladies, imbued with a sense of the courtesy due them, retaliated with the weapons at hand when white rowdies tried to push them off the sidewalks into the muddy streets. People pressed on and tugged at racial divisions, white people usually unwittingly and accidentally, black people often consciously and purposefully. A hopeful reader might even wonder if the immediate future of the color line was just a little uncertain.

In response to this fluidity, repression came suddenly and thunderously in 1898. The catalyst was the triumph two years earlier of third-party Populists and Republicans who fused to win control of the state government, a coalition that betokened the alliance of white men of modest means in the western part of the state with blacks in the cities. Angry Democratic Party leaders staged their comeback by orchestrating a statewide black-on-white rape scare, taking their cue from similar tactics in the Deep South. Sex, race, and violence came together in the distinctive Southern toxic mix, with the protection of white womanhood the new centerpiece of politics. Black political leaders' attempts to puncture the hyperbole of the rape scare led to the Wilmington Riot, one of the worst urban race riots the country had seen to date. Fires, looting, gunfire, and house-to-house searches resulted in black deaths and precipitated a mass exodus of horrified middle-class African Americans from the state.

By 1899, Gilmore maintains, a thriving black middle-class civic culture was destroyed. Many of its leaders were in exile in the North. There was little defense against the next steps: the expulsion of blacks from the Republican Party and the institution of legal provisions for black male disenfranchisement. And Jim Crow settled into social life as well. For the first time in their lives, black people of property and standing rode segregated railroad cars.

After the events of 1898, black men, no matter what their economic, spiritual, or political claims to authority, were *personae non grata* in North Carolina politics. But women, already disenfranchised, occupied a much humbler corner of the public domain. They became in the early twentieth century the sole public representatives of the race—a great irony for a people whose politics since the Civil War had revolved around upright manhood. The women served as modest envoys and diplomats of the black community to local and state authorities. The energies that had fueled temperance work now expanded into a great network of church societies, always invisible, to encourage good housekeeping among the black poor; teachers' groups which lobbied for supplies and services for their desperately underfinanced segregated schools; and civic clubs which demanded sanitation services and public health measures for neglected neighborhoods from governments beholden to the new spirit of Southern white progressivism.

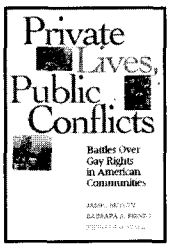
After 1898, the feminine élan was muted. The signature style of the women who came of age after the turn of the century was ostentatiously Victorian: devout and meek. Even the preparation for "usefulness" changed in tone; corroded by the pressures of Washingtonian industrial education, the classical regimen at the seminaries buckled, giving way to courses in housekeeping and sewing. In their towns and their small cities, this generation of women organized uplifting clubs for the poor with names like "Buds of Promise" and taught schoolgirls to bake cakes.

In practice, however, these decent, dignified, and seemingly drab churchwomen were sharp customers: akin to early New Dealers, Gilmore suggests. They were adept at squeezing services out of governments. With the steely interracial patience bequeathed to them from the temperance movement, they made alliances with public-spirited white women to get what they wanted, in civic associations such as the Young Women's Christian Association, a hotbed of early civil rights work. In the regime of Jim Crow, white women were more loath to work politically with black women than they had been in the 1890s, but they were interested in many of the same social issues—in getting rid of flies, for example, the plague of the South in an era when the streets were still full of garbage and horse manure and screens were not yet widely in use—and so campaigns against flies it was.

Still, there was an edge to this accommodationist generation. Some of their interracial activity spilled over into the fight for women's suffrage, especially after Congress in 1919 finally passed the Nineteenth Amendment, and suffragists pushed for ratification in the states. The conventional historians' wisdom on women's suffrage once held that victory finally came when white women, their conception of the vote fundamentally racist, secured Southern support by driving black women out of the movement. This view, which draws its justifications from the darkest assessments of the

". . . an important contribution to our understanding of a contentious political issue."

John D'Emilio, Director of The Policy Institute of the National Gay and Lesbian Task Force



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plights of blacks in these years, has bred a judgment of white suffragists that Gilmore wants to forgo.

Instead, she makes a more complicated case for a ripple effect between civil rights for women and civil rights for blacks. When antisuffragists raised a hue and cry that the Nineteenth Amendment would open the doors again to "Negro rule," she argues, they were not wrong. They were right not because white suffragists allied with blacks (suffragists steadfastly ignored the race issue, taking the lofty view that the issue of women's votes had nothing to do with Jim Crow realities); they were right because the middle-class black women who had been sharpening their political skills in seemingly innocuous uplift work, sponsoring community cleanup days and teaching sewing to the poor, took advantage of the amendment to put black people back in the theater of Election Day in the South.

Gilmore's book ends with a remarkable chapter about civil rights activism that, until she unearthed it, has been virtually unknown. In the fall of 1920, after the last state ratified women's suffrage, African American women went together to the polls to register *en masse*. They risked the violent reprisals that had kept men from the voting booths after 1898, the beatings, the house burnings, the murders, all made more menacing by the terrible race riots that had swept the country in the "red summer" of the previous year. In North Carolina, however, even die-hard conservatives could not whip up any brutal enthusiasm for putting "uppity" Negroes in their place when the uppity Negroes were female.

The black women didn't turn the tide of Jim Crow, at least not at that moment. Registrars turned away the prospective black Republicans on the flimsiest pretexts, and less than a thousand out of tens of thousands were allowed to register. When white women showed up, the registrars welcomed them, and they registered almost unanimously for the Democratic Party. But Gilmore suggests that something did crack. For the first time in nearly twenty-five years, black voters approached the polls in crowds, gathering there through coordinated effort, and faced down the threat of violence. When turned away, black women sought the help of the federal government and the NAACP. Despite the immediate failure of their protests, black people, male and female, kept up the pressure and registered in increasing numbers throughout the 1920s. The rudiments of a civil rights movement were in place, and they were put there by women.

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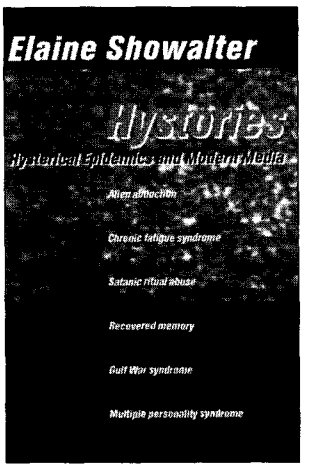

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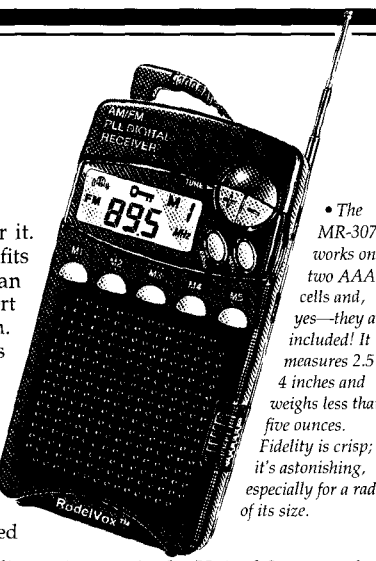

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Some elements of Gilmore's revisionist approach to the dark hours of Jim Crow as a period of covert activity are familiar. What is really new about *Gender and Jim Crow* is the case that Gilmore makes for the centrality of women to that activity—their reworking, in circumstances of great duress, of a repertory of civic strategies that would prove critical to interracial politics in the twentieth century. She wants her readers to look hard at a distinct kind of political person, an African American woman, a figure who disappears if the focus shifts to either leaders of the Northern women's movement or Southern "race men."

To fix the frame so that our gaze won't waver, Gilmore fences off her subjects with the analytical language of "class," "race" and "gender," a historian's shorthand for competing and sometimes contradictory sets of allegiances. Class and race and gender are the required categories of scholarship right now, markers of the writer's political fealties. In Gilmore's hands, the formulaic terminology does take on some suppleness, helping her to tease out what was so particular and unique about the political synthesis African American women achieved. But class-race-gender constricts her book, too, and at times impedes her agile imagination and her beautiful prose. These formulas cut off Gilmore from fruitful generalities about the ways in which an inchoate imagination of American women's freedom at the end of the nineteenth century floated over the color line.

The surge of faith in their own possibilities which took black women into politics at the end of the century was certainly African American, but to my mind it was also distinctly female. Gilmore doesn't say so, but in many ways the North Carolinians can be seen as impressive Southern representatives of an intrepid generation of self-consciously New Women setting out as young adults in the late nineteenth century to change the world. In the North, the New Woman was a figure of nascent female modernity, so ubiquitous and striking as already to have captured the imagination of the culture. Henry James, one of many writers who dwelled on heroines more than heroes, compressed the drama of the New Woman into a relatively narrow compass, the search of idealistic heiresses for a life that "matters" in the world, a life that broke with Victorian convention and all it embodied of women's relegation to domesticity. But the quest spread in the late nineteenth century far beyond James's Boston parlors and Florentine drawing rooms. It came to settlement houses, hospitals, colleges, and philanthropies where self-consciously New Women devoted themselves to bettering their society and, in the process, to creating a collective destiny for their sex that went beyond marriage and motherhood. Gilmore's book leads me to believe that it reached black North Carolina, too.

The hunger for learning, the insistence on meaningful work, the broad conception of social duty: these were all strains of a yearning that would become the psychological basis of modern feminism, the desire for a life beyond what one New Woman, Jane Addams, called "the family claim." These were the driving passions of black women, too. But for them, the antagonism between the self and the family was absent, or at least muted. The paradigmatic New Woman saw marriage and family ties as detrimental to her mission, and family as an encumbrance. But such sensational breaks with convention were not in the cards for middle-class black women, who had gone to college with men and continued to forge their politics in alliance with men, as well as with fathers and mothers, aunts and uncles. In fact, their lives after college appeared outwardly to differ little from lingering Victorian ideals. They married upstanding men and entered traditionally feminine venues of church work, schoolteaching, and charity.

The ideals of Southern black women, the ethic of duty, service to one's own and loyalty to one's men, so fortifying in their often thankless work, had no place in the nascent scenario of New Womanhood that the national culture recognized. The political tradition that these extraordinary black women founded was distinctly female, with important ideas about women's situation, but because of its permeability to loyalties outside "the sex"—to men, to children, to the community widely considered—it has been difficult to call this tradition feminist. Black feminists today have tried to get around the problem in various ways: by dubbing black women's politics "womanist," for example.

African American conceptions of emancipated womanhood, inwardly forged from tough resistance, retained the outward appearance of Victorian feminine altruism, family-mindedness, and propriety. In the twentieth century, all this was difficult to reconcile with the personal iconoclasm, the kick-out-the traces sensibility, that has historically gone under the name of feminism. Those Northern, metropolitan ideals about women's freedom stressed individual self-realization as the basis of social change rather than the other way around. Men, in that scheme, could be obliging fellow travelers, but they were definitely in the rearguard of the campaign to reconstruct humanity into one big "human sex." For Northern New Women in the years that Gilmore discusses, the will to change women's situation proceeded from a core of gender separatism, from a tightly drawn "us." For black New Women, however, the "us" was not an option. Politics always proceeded from imperfect alliances with "them": with black men, with white women.

The pioneering endeavors of these black women represented a pragmatism in which shrewdness commingled with principle. The contrast to our own era of identity politics, when common action is forestalled by the proliferating lines between groups, is instructive and discouraging. Heirs to the tough accommodations of Reconstruction, these women stood apart from the

You Will Not Taste Death
Jesus and Epicureanism

Despite close Epicurean friends, Cicero called Epicureanism the most dangerous of philosophies because it undermined the virtues basic to civilization; yet it most closely approaches a modern scientific world view. Two recently discovered documents: the Gospel of Thomas and the Secret Gospel of Mark interrelate with the skeletal chronicle underlying the Gospel of Mark to make credible the authenticity of Thomas' 113 sayings of Jesus and give them context. In these Jesus speaks from an Epicurean, not Judaic, stand. Author: Jack Hannah, 321 pp.pbk, $12 postpaid. FRANK PUBLISHING, 1816 Springmill Road, Mansfield, OH 44903-8907.

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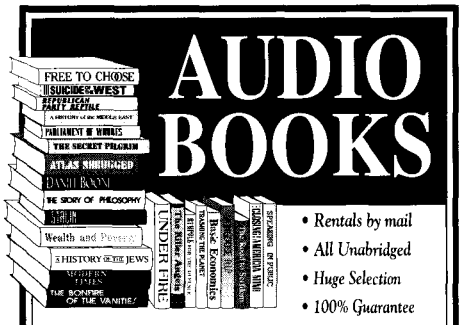

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perfectionist spirit of American radicalism that looks to politics to bring God's kingdom to earth, the spirit that has buoyed the women's movement and the civil rights movement in their loftiest days. Gilmore's heroines did not believe that politics would change the country, or bring about a new day for men's dealings with women or white people's dealings with blacks, but they did think that politics would improve people's lives and might eventually defeat Jim Crow. They held to a generous, fluid conception of the collective interest.

These women lived behind a line not of their own making. Yet they never stopped acting upon the premise that there was no "us" and "them," there was only one big "us." They assumed that the "us" was male and female, and they were determined to make it black and white as well. Their ideas about women, placed next to those of the most arresting feminist proposals of the century, seem mild-mannered, their criticisms of relations between the sexes merely polite. In their understanding of the arts of democratic politics, however, they look pretty good.

CHRISTINE STANSELL is a professor of history at Princeton University.

TRB *continued from page 6*

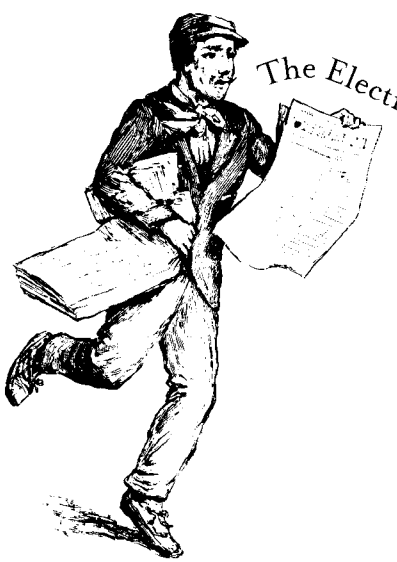
head in silent admiration. A hatter would tip his hat to him. If McDougal were a belfry, bats would fly in and out of him. And there is, McDougal says, reason to think his ex-wife will keep on keeping her mouth shut; she was once, he believes, an especially good friend of Bill's.

There is, of course, the possibility that Clinton has nothing to fear from Starr: that he is innocent, that he did not have anything to do with the scheme to defraud the government, and that he did not perjure himself. How real is this possibility? Here we face a revealing set of facts. Susan McDougal is languishing in prison because she will not answer a federal prosecutor's questions about, among other things, the president's involvement in the $300,000 illegal loan. Her reticence is not motivated by concern for personal safety; she has been offered before, and would be offered again, immunity against prosecution for whatever criminal acts she confessed to, so that her Fifth Amendment right against self-incrimination would not be violated. She is silent, therefore, because she believes that it would be wrong to cooperate with Starr, that it would amount to a betrayal of Clinton.

Presumably, it grieves Clinton that his friend is in prison only because she will not answer questions about his activities. Presumably, Clinton would like to see his name cleared of allegations of fraud and perjury. And, presumably, Susan McDougal is in a position to do that. She could testify tomorrow that Jim McDougal and David Hale were lying when they said Clinton was involved in obtaining the illegal $300,000 loan, and that Clinton had not lied on the witness stand.

The president could have Susan McDougal do this for the mere asking. He could, today, say publicly that, in the interest of justice, he wishes Susan to answer the independent counsel's questions honestly and fully. Just tell the truth, he could say. Given Clinton's blessing and urging, Susan McDougal no doubt would be happy to testify, and thus earn her release from prison. Of course, Susan can only testify to clear Clinton's name, and Clinton can only afford to ask her to testify, if Clinton is innocent. And surely that is the case; Clinton has assured us, repeatedly, of his innocence. Why does an innocent man not rush to urge his friend to end her suffering, and to clear his name?

MICHAEL KELLY



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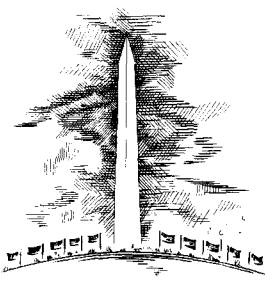
WASHINGTON DIARIST

Housebound

TO BE KEPT HOME SICK IS ONE OF the secret joys of childhood. At least it was of mine. I remember every book I read while confined to bed by some passing illness—confined but also set free, for there I was with empty, languorous hours in which to linger over viscous delicacies like butterscotch pudding and canned tomato soup and lose myself in *Misty of Chincoteague* or *Island of the Blue Dolphins*. Sickness was my island, and I was pleasantly marooned on it. In Southern California, where I grew up, weather almost never kept us indoors. But a cough did, or one of those fugitive high fevers of childhood that always frighten parents much more than they do kids. My mother was a devout exponent of the germ theory and had nothing good to say about parents who sent their kids to school with dripping noses or rumbling coughs. So home I stayed, with no hope of ever winning those annual good attendance awards, but with no real fear that I was missing much, either. I think maybe school was easier then; at any rate I don't recall ever feeling that a few days stolen here or there from third grade would bar me from the Ivy League. (I didn't actually know what the Ivy League was.)

I REMEMBER THE WAY TIME stretched like taffy and how much I liked that. Outside, the sun spread a slow peroxide burn over the sky, and I could hear the sprinklers on the lawn swish-swishing like the flick of a horse's tail. Now and then, when I was feeling better, I'd get up from a bed lightly strewn with Pop Tart crumbs and steal a glance at myself in the mirror. My mother would have braided my lank hair so it wouldn't get matted as I lay in bed all day, and my face stared back at me with a satisfying strangeness, a faintly glamorous morbidity. Lips chapped, skin pale with the bluish tinge of skim milk, I looked wan—I remember learning the word on one of those days—exotic, even.

A SICK-AT-HOME DAY WAS A CUSHiony pocket of stillness in the normal rush of things, a day that had its own rituals but no routine. My father was an actor and, like most actors, often out of work. So I was lucky; he could stay home with me and play endless games of Scrabble. Or if he was working, my mother would call in to her job and tell them I was sick, and she and I would curl up on the couch, giggling over reruns of "Bewitched" or "That Girl" and drinking Welch's grape juice from germ-resistant paper cups. On days like these, my mother might tell me, say, the story of how she met my dad, drawing it out in a slyly bemused way because, after all, we weren't exactly expected anywhere. And besides, there's nothing more conducive to nostalgic confidences than a dim room and a fever-fogged kid grateful for her parent's proximity. Of course, by the third day, I'd be restless, itching to bang up my shins on the monkey bars and feel the sun on my skin. But those first two days were a paradise of cozy enervation.



THESE MEMORIES CAME to mind recently because I've been reading about the new vogue in family-friendly policies at various big American companies: so-called "work-life" programs that help employees overcome the division between work and home by, in essence, making work more home-like. Or, more precisely, by letting the corporation take over the kinds of household tasks we used to have the time and the inclination to do ourselves. A growing number of companies offer benefits like in-house dry-cleaning, photo-processing and personal shopping—for anniversary presents and the like. The Xerox Corporation provides birthday cakes so the busy parents in its employ won't have to stop at the neighborhood bakery or whomp up a devil's food treat themselves. The cafeteria at the Eddie Bauer headquarters stays open late to provide take-home meals for employees who've remained at their desks after hours. No fuss, no muss, no reason to rush home. At the offices of a California cyber-magazine, a kitchen on the premises bakes "homemade" cookies all day, their scent wafting through the cubicles like a subliminal message that work is where the heart is.

EVEN MORE COMMON ARE EMERgency child-care arrangements provided by the company—including round-the-clock care for the benefit of employees working way, way overtime and on-site centers to which parents can schlepp their sick kids if the little ones are too snuffly or fretful to go to school or to their regular child care. (In cloying corporatese, First Tennessee Bank named theirs "Sniffles and Snuggles.") According to *Working Woman* magazine, a company called Lancaster Labs cuts the costs of absenteeism by dispatching visiting nurses to its employees' homes to care for their sick children. Which is nice, I guess, except who wants to send a stranger, even a highly trained stranger, to soothe her feverish kid? At the family-friendly Patagonia Company in Ventura California, female executives are encouraged to bring their sick toddlers to meetings. Which is also nice, I guess, except who wants to run a meeting while managing the demands of a runny-nosed 2-year-old? And who wants to go to that meeting?

THE COMPANIES, OF COURSE, TOUT all this as evidence of progress and sensitivity. So do magazines such as *Business Week*, which put Eddie Bauer and First Tennessee Bank on its recent list of the top ten family-friendly employers. But I'm not so sure. Yes, it's reassuring to know you can rely on company-sanctioned emergency child care if you feel you have no choice but to head for the office when your kid gets sick or your babysitter goes AWOL. Only, shouldn't you—sometimes, anyway—have the choice? What the new policies really create is a world in which there are fewer and fewer legitimate excuses for staying home occasionally or even for leaving the office at 6 p.m. With this Big Mother approach, it becomes much harder to justify taking a half-hour out to do an errand—or to pretend to do an errand and actually walk around the block and clear your head. It didn't surprise me to learn that, in one recent study, the family-friendly benefit favored by the vast majority of employees surveyed was the right to pool their holidays and sick days and use them as they saw fit—often, apparently, to care for a sick child.

LAST WEEK, MY 9-MONTH-OLD BABY was ill. Bleary-eyed and miserable from an ear infection coupled with conjunctivitis, he cried every time I left the room. He'd been happily weaning himself the week before but now he wanted to nurse again, and I wanted to give him that comfort. Since I have a kind boss and a flexible schedule, I told our babysitter to take two days off and I stayed home. I know, I know—bully for me. But I can't tell you how grateful I was to be able to do that and how much I wish every working mother could do the same. That's my idea of a work-life program—the understanding that a surrogate for a parent will not always do, that home and work are not interchangeable, and that home must sometimes take precedence. You'd have to feed me a whole lot of company cake before I'd begin to think anything different.

MARGARET TALBOT

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Theodore Waitt

Gateway 2000, North Sioux City, SD. 34. Married, 4 children.

Talked out of joining family cattle business. By father. Left college senior year to start computer mail order business in farmhouse. With $10,000 start-up loan secured by grandmother's CD.

"Everybody was heading to Silicon Valley. So I picked a cornfield."

Cofounded Gateway 2000 with partner, Mike Hammond. 1985. Direct-market PC seller and manufacturer based in South Dakota. First year revenues $100,000. Explosive growth due to low costs, fast service. Expanded overseas, 1993. Marketing coup: chose Holstein as company mascot.

"It was either the family cow or the family dog. 'Bunky' lost."

1996 revenues: $5 billion.

Started reading Forbes as a student at the University of Iowa in 1984.

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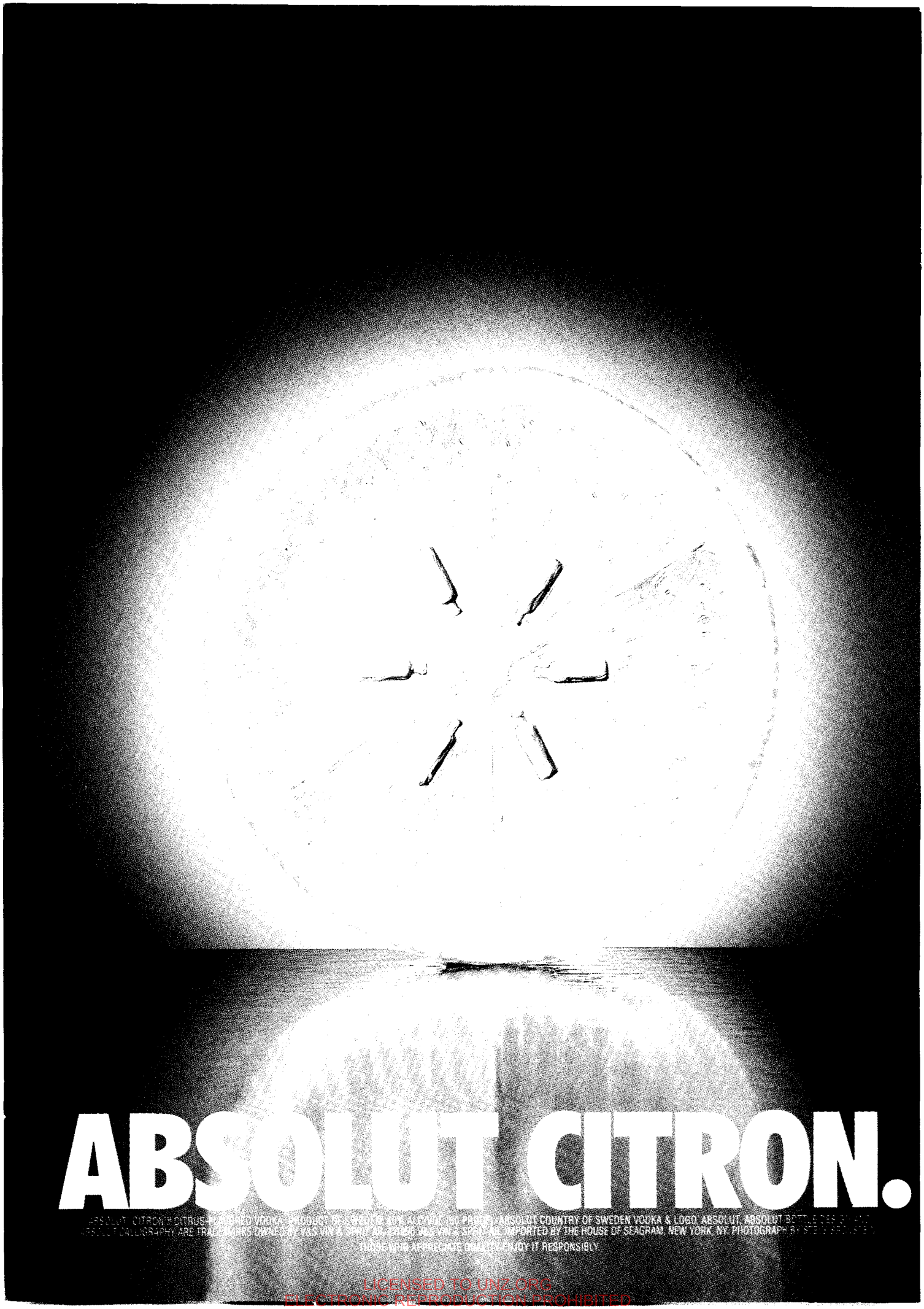
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